BASHFUL FIFTEEN

L. T. MEADE

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"NOW, HOW OLD AM I?"—*p.* 16.

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BY

L. T. MEADE

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BASHFUL FIFTEEN.

CHAPTER I.

CURIOSITY.

THE school stood on the side of a hill, which faced downward to the sea. Its aspect was south, and it was sheltered from the east and west winds by a thick plantation of young trees, which looked green and fresh in the spring, and were beginning already to afford a delightful shade in hot weather.

A fashionable watering-place called Eastcliff was situated about a mile from Mulberry Court, the old-fashioned house, with the old-world gardens, where the schoolgirls lived. There were about fifty of them in all, and they had to confess that although Mulberry Court was undoubtedly school, yet those who lived in the house and played in the gardens, and had merry games and races on the seashore, enjoyed a specially good time which they would be glad to think of by and by.

The period at which this story begins was the middle of the summer term. There were no half-term holidays at the Court, but somehow the influence of holiday time had already got into the air. The young girls had tired themselves out with play, and the older ones lay about in hammocks, or strolled in twos or

threes up and down the wide gravel walk which separated the house from the gardens.

The ages of these fifty girls ranged from seventeen to five, but from seventeen down to five on this special hot summer's evening one topic of conversation might have been heard on every tongue.

What would the new girl be like? Was she rich or poor, handsome or ugly, tall or short, dark or fair? Why did she come in the middle of the term, and why did Mrs. Freeman, and Miss Delicia, and Miss Patience make such a fuss about her?

Other new girls had arrived, and only the faintest rumors had got out about them beforehand.

A couple of maids had been seen carrying a new trunk upstairs, or old Piper had been discovered crawling down the avenue with his shaky cab, and shakier horse, and then the new girl had appeared at tea-time and been formally introduced, and if she were shy had got over it as best she could, and had soon discovered her place in class, and there was an end of the matter.

But this new girl was not following out any of the old precedents.

She was coming at mid-term, which in itself was rather exceptional.

Mrs. Freeman and Miss Patience had driven away in a very smart carriage with a pair of horses to meet her.

Miss Delicia was fussing in and out of the house, and picking fresh strawberries, and nodding to the girls she happened to meet with a kind of suppressed delight.

What *could* it all mean? It really was most exciting.

The smaller girls chatted volubly about the matter, and little Violet Temple, aged ten, and of course one of the small girls, so far forgot herself as to run up to

Dorothy Collingwood, clasp her hand affectionately round the tall girl's arm, and whisper in her impetuous, eager way:

"I'm almost certain, Dolly, that she's to sleep in a room by herself, for I saw the Blue Room being got ready. I peeped in as we were going down to dinner, and I noticed such jolly new furniture—pale blue, and all to match. Oh, what is it, Olive? How you've pinched my arm."

"Run back to your companions this minute, miss," said Olive Moore. "You're getting to be a perfect tittle-tattle, Violet. There, I'm not angry, child, but you must learn not to talk about everything you see."

Violet frowned all over her fair, small face, but Olive Moore, a sixth-form girl, was too powerful an individual to be lightly disregarded. She shrugged her shoulders therefore, and walked sulkily away.

"Why did you speak so sharply to her, Olive?" exclaimed Dorothy. "After all, her curiosity is but natural—I must even own that I share it myself."

"So do I, Dorothy, if it comes to that, but Violet must be made to know her place. She is one of those little encroachers without respect of persons, who can become absolute nuisances if they are encouraged. But there, we have said enough about her. Ruth and Janet are going to sit in 'The Lookout' for a little; they want to discuss the subject of the Fancy Fair. Shall we come and join them?"

Dorothy turned with her companion; they walked along the wide gravel sweep, then entered a narrow path which wound gradually up-hill. They soon reached a rural tower, which was called by the girls "The Lookout," mounted some steep steps, and found

themselves standing on a little platform, where two other girls were waiting to receive them.

Ruth Bury was short and dark, but Janet May, her companion, was extremely slim and fair. She would have been a pretty girl but for the somewhat disagreeable expression of her face.

"Here you are," exclaimed the two pairs of lips eagerly.

"Sit down, Dorothy," cried Ruth, "we have kept your favorite armchair vacant for you. Now, then, to discuss the Fancy Fair in all its bearings. Is it not kind of Mrs. Freeman to consent to our having it? She says it is quite an unusual thing for girls like us to do, but in the cause of that poor little baby, and because we wish the Fancy Fair to be our break-up treat, she consents. The only stipulation she makes is that we arrange the whole programme without troubling her."

"Yes," continued Janet, "she met me half an hour ago, and told me to let you know, Dorothy, and you, Olive, and any other girls who happen to be specially interested, that we are to form our programme, and then ask her to give us an audience. She will look herself into all our plans, and tell us which can and cannot be carried into effect. The only other thing she stipulates is that we do not neglect our studies, and that we leave room in the happy day's proceedings for the distribution of the prizes."

While Janet was speaking, Dorothy, who had refused to seat herself in the armchair assigned to her, and whose clear, bright blue eyes were roving eagerly all over the beautiful summer landscape, exclaimed in an eager voice:

"After all, what does the Fancy Fair signify—I

mean—oh, don't be shocked, girls—I mean, what does it signify compared to a real living *present* interest? While we are discussing what is to take place in six weeks' time, Mrs. Freeman and Miss Patience are driving up the avenue with *somebody else*. Girls, the new inmate of Mulberry Court has begun to put in an appearance on the scene."

"Oh, let me look; do let me look!" cried Ruth, while Olive and Janet both pressed eagerly forward.

From where they stood they obtained a very distinct although somewhat bird's-eye view of the winding avenue and quickly approaching carriage. Mrs. Freeman's tall and familiar figure was too well known to be worthy, in that supreme moment, of even a passing comment. Miss Patience looked as angular and as like herself as ever; but a girl, who sat facing the two ladies—a girl who wore a large shady hat, and whose light dress and gay ribbons fluttered in the summer breeze—upon this girl the eyes of the four watchers in the "Lookout" tower were fixed with devouring curiosity.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Dorothy, after a pause. "I don't suppose Mrs. Freeman will allow that style of wardrobe long. See, girls, do see, how her long blue ribbons stream in the breeze; and her hat! it is absolutely *covered* with roses—I'm convinced they are roses. Oh, what would I not give for an opera glass to enable me to take a nearer view. Whoever that young person is, she intends to take the shine out of us. Why, she is dressed as if she had just come from a garden party."

"I don't believe she's a new schoolgirl at all," cried Ruth; "she's just a visitor come to stay for a day or two with Mrs. Freeman. No schoolgirl that ever

breathed would dare to present such a young lady, grown-up appearance. There, girls, don't let's waste any more time over her; let's turn our attention to the much more important matter of the Fancy Fair."

Notwithstanding these various criticisms, the carriage with its occupants calmly pursued its way, and was presently lost to view in the courtyard at the side of the house.

"Now, do let us be sensible," said Janet, turning to her companions. "We have seen all that there is to be seen. However hard we guess we cannot solve the mystery. Either a new companion is coming among us, who, I have no doubt, will be as commonplace as commonplace can be, or Mrs. Freeman is receiving a young lady visitor. Supper will decide the point, and as that is not half an hour away I suppose we can exist for the present without worrying our brains any further."

"Dear Janey, you always were the soul of sense," remarked Dorothy, in a somewhat languid voice. "For my part I pity those poor little mites, Violet and the rest of them. I know they are just as curious with regard to the issue of events as we are, and yet I can see them at this moment, with my mental vision, being driven like sheep into the fold. They'll be in bed, poor mites, when we are satisfying our curiosity."

"You have a perfect mania for those children, Dorothy," exclaimed Olive. "I call it an impertinence on their parts to worry themselves about sixth-form girls. What's the matter, Janet? Why that contraction of your angel brow?"

"I want us to utilize our opportunities," said Janet. "We have a few minutes all to ourselves to discuss the

Fancy Fair, and we fritter it away on that tiresome new girl."

"Well, let's settle to business now," said Ruth; "I'm sure I'm more than willing. Who has got a pencil and paper?"

Dorothy pulled an envelope out of her pocket. Olive searched into the recesses of hers to hunt up a lead pencil, and Janet continued to speak in her tranquil, round tones.

"The first thing to do is to appoint a committee," she began.

"O Janey," exclaimed two of the other girls in a breath, "a committee does sound so absurdly formal."

"Never mind, it is the correct thing to do. In a matter of this kind we are nothing if we are not businesslike. Now, who *is* coming to interrupt us?"

Steps—several steps—were heard clattering up the stone stairs of the little tower, and two or three girls of the middle school, with roughly tossed heads and excited faces, burst upon the seclusion of the four sixth-form girls.

"O Dolly," they exclaimed, running up to their favorite, "she has come—we have seen her! She is very tall, and—and——"

"Do let me speak, Marion," exclaimed little Violet Temple, coloring all over her round face in her excitement and interest. "You know I got the first glimpse of her. I did, you know I did. I was hiding under the laurel arch, and I saw her quite close. It's awfully unfair of anyone else to tell, isn't it, Dolly?"

"Of course it is, Violet," replied Miss Collingwood in her good-natured way. "But what a naughty imp you were to hide under the laurel arch. The wonder

is you did not get right in the way of the horses' hoofs."

"Much I cared for that when I had a chance of seeing her," remarked Violet. "I *did* get a splendid peep. She's awfully tall, and she was splendidly dressed; and O Dolly! O Ruthie! O Janey! she's just *lovely!*"

"I wish you'd go away, child!" said Janet in a decidedly cross tone. "What are all you small girls doing out and about at this hour? Surely it's time for you to be in bed. What can Miss Marshall be about not to have fetched you before now?"

"Cross-patch!" murmured Violet, turning her back on Janet. "Come, Marion; come, Pauline, we won't tell her any more. We'll tell *you*, Dolly, of course, but we won't tell Janet. Come, Marion, let's go."

The children disappeared in as frantic haste to be off as they were a few minutes ago to arrive.

"Now, let's go on," said Janet, in her calm tones. "Let us try and settle something before the supper bell rings. We must have a committee, that goes without saying. Suppose we four girls form it."

"What about Evelyn?" inquired Dorothy.

When she said this a quick change flitted over Janet's face. She bit her lips, and, after a very brief pause, said in a voice of would-be indifference:

"I don't suppose that Evelyn Percival is to rule the school. She is away at present, and we can't wait on her will and pleasure. Let's form our committee, and do without her."

"It's a distinct insult," began Dolly. "I disapprove —I disapprove."

"And so do I"—"And I"—cried both Ruth and Olive.

"Well," said Janet, "if you insist on spoiling everything, girls, you must. You know what Evelyn is."

"Only the head girl of the school," remarked Dolly in a soft tone. "But of course a person of not the *smallest* consequence. Well, Janet, what next?"

"As I was saying," began Janet——

A loud booming sound filled the air.

Ruth clapped her hands.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Supper!" she cried. "Your committee must keep, Janet. Now for the satisfaction of rampant, raging curiosity. Dolly, will you race me to the house?"

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW GIRL.

ALTHOUGH the booming sound of the great gong filled the air, the supper to which the head girls of the school were now going was a very simple affair. It consisted of milk placed in great jugs at intervals down the long table, of fruit both cooked and uncooked, and large plates of bread and butter.

Such as it was, however, supper was a much-prized institution of Mulberry Court; only the fifth-form and sixth-form girls were allowed to partake of it. To sit up to supper, therefore, was a distinction intensely envied by the lower school. The plain fare sounded to them like honey and ambrosia. They were never tired of speculating as to what went on in the dining room on these occasions, and the idea of sitting up to supper was with some of the girls a more stimulating reason for being promoted to the fifth form than any other which could be offered.

On this special night in the mid-term the girls who were ignominiously obliged to retire to their bedrooms felt a sorer sense of being left out than ever.

As Dorothy and her companions walked through the wide, cool entrance hall, and turned down the stone passage which led to the supper room, they were quite conscious of the fact that some of the naughtiest and most adventurous imps of the lower

school were hovering round, hanging over banisters or hiding behind doors. A suppressed giggle of laughter proceeded so plainly from the back of one of the doors, that Dorothy could not resist stretching back her hand as she passed, and giving a playful tap on the panels with her knuckles. The suppressed laughter became dangerously audible when she did this, so in mercy she was forced to take no further notice.

The girls entered the wide, long dining hall and immediately took their places at the table.

Mrs. Freeman always presided at the head of the board, Miss Patience invariably sat at the foot, Miss Delicia wandered about restlessly, helping the girls to milk and fruit, patting her favorites on their backs, bending down to inquire tenderly how this girl's headache was, and if another had come off conqueror in her tennis match. No girl in the school minded or feared Miss Delicia in the least. Unlike her two sisters, who were tall and thin, she was a little body with a round face, rosy cheeks, hair very much crimped, and eyes a good deal creased with constant laughter. No one had ever seen Miss Delicia the least bit cross or the least bit annoyed with anyone. She was invariably known to weep with the sorrowful, and laugh with the gay—she was a great coddler and physicker—thought petting far better than punishment, and play much more necessary for young girls than lessons.

In consequence she was popular, with that mild sort of popularity which is bestowed upon the people who are all patience and have no faculty for inspiring fear.

Mrs. Freeman could be austere as well as kind, and Mrs. Freeman was ten times more loved than Miss Delicia.

The girls took their places at the table—grace was said, and the meal began.

A sense of disappointment was over them all, for the new girl upon whom their present thoughts were centered had not put in an appearance—nothing was said about her—Mrs. Freeman looked as tranquil as usual, Miss Patience as white and anxious, Miss Delicia as good-natured and downy.

Dorothy was beginning to whisper to her companion that all their excitement was safe to end in smoke, when the door at the farther end of the dining hall was softly pushed open, and a head of luxuriant nut-brown curling hair was popped in. Two roguish dark blue eyes looked down the long room—they greeted with an eager sort of delighted welcome each fresh girl face, and then the entire person of a tall, showily dressed girl entered.

"My dear Bridget!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeman, so surprised by the unexpected apparition that she was actually obliged to rise from her seat and come forward.

"Oh, my dear, ought you not to be asleep?" exclaimed Miss Patience in thin, anxious tones from the other end of the board, while Miss Delicia ran up to the girl and took one of her dimpled white hands in hers.

"I did not feel tired, Mrs. Freeman," replied the newcomer in an eager, irrepressible sort of voice. "You put me into my room and told me to go to bed, but I didn't want to go to bed. I have had my supper, thank you, so I don't want any more, but I have been dying with curiosity to see the girls. Are these they? Are these my schoolfellows? I never saw a schoolfellow before. They all look pretty much like other

people. How do you do, each and all of you? I'm Bridget O'Hara. May I sit near you, Mrs. Freeman?"

"Sit there, Miss O'Hara, please," said Mrs. Freeman. She tried to suppress a smile, which was difficult. "Girls," she said, addressing the fifth and sixth forms, "girls, this young lady is your new schoolfellow—her name is Bridget O'Hara. I meant to introduce her to you formally to-morrow, but she has taken the matter into her own hands. I am glad you are not tired, Miss O'Hara, for you have had a very long journey."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Miss O'Hara, "that's nothing. Goodness gracious me! what would you think of thirty or forty miles on an Irish jaunting car, all in one day, Mrs. Freeman? That's the sort of thing to make the back ache. Bump, bump, you go. You catch on to the sides of the car for bare life, and as likely as not you're pitched out into a bog two or three times before you get home. Papa and I have often taken our thirty to forty miles' jaunt a day. I can tell you, I have been stiff after those rides. Did you ever ride on a jaunting car, Mrs. Freeman?"

"No, my dear," replied the head mistress, in a rather icy voice, "I have never had the pleasure of visiting Ireland."

"Well, it's a very fine sort of place, as free and easy as you please; lots of fishing in the lakes and in the rivers. I'm very fond of my gun, too. Can you handle a gun, Mrs. Freeman? It kicks rather, if you can't manage it."

An audible titter was heard down the table, and Mrs. Freeman turned somewhat red.

"Will you have some fruit?" she said coldly, laying

a restraining hand as she spoke on the girl's beflowered and embroidered dress.

"No fruit, thank you. Oh, what a lovely ring you have on! It's a ruby, isn't it? My poor mother—she died when I was only three—had some splendid rubies—they are to be mine when I am grown up. Papa is keeping them for me in the County Bank. You always keep your valuables in the Bank in Ireland, you know—that's on account of the Land Leaguers."

"I think, my dear, we won't talk quite so much," said Mrs. Freeman. "At most of our meals German is the only language spoken. Supper, of course, is an exception. Why, what is the matter. Miss O'Hara?"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Bridget O'Hara, "am I to be dumb during breakfast, dinner, and tea? I don't know a word of German. Why, I'll die if I can't chatter. It's a way we have in Ireland. We *must* talk."

"Patience," said Mrs. Freeman, from her end of the supper table, "I think we have all finished. Will you say grace?"

There was a movement of chairs, and a general rising.

Miss Patience asked for a blessing on the meal just partaken of in a clear, emphatic voice, and the group of girls began to file out of the room.

"May I go with the others?" asked Miss O'Hara.

"Yes, certainly. Let me introduce you to someone in particular. Janet May, come here, my dear."

Janet turned at the sound of her name, and came quickly up to her mistress. She looked slight, pale, and almost insignificant beside the full, blooming, luxuriously made girl, who, resting one hand in a noncha-

lant manner on the back of her chair, was looking full at her with laughing bright eyes.

"Janet," said Mrs. Freeman, "will you oblige me by showing Miss O'Hara the schoolrooms and common rooms, and introducing her to one or two of her companions? Go, my dear," she continued, "but remember, Bridget, whether you are tired or not, I shall expect you to go to bed to-night at nine o'clock. It is half-past eight now, so you have half an hour to get acquainted with your schoolfellows."

"My! what a minute!" said Miss Bridget, tossing back her abundant hair, and slipping one firm, dimpled hand inside Janet's arm. "Well, come on, darling," she continued, giving that young lady an affectionate squeeze. "Let's make the most of our precious time. I'm dying to know you all—I think you look so sweet. Who's that love of a girl in gray, who sat next you at supper? She had golden hair, and blue eyes—not like mine, of course, but well enough for English eyes. What's her name, dear?"

"I think you must mean Dorothy Collingwood," said Janet in her clear, cold English voice. "May I ask if you have ever been at school before, Miss O'Hara?"

"Oh, good gracious me! don't call me Miss O'Hara. I'm Biddy to my friends—Biddy O'Hara, at your service—great fun, too, I can tell you. You ask my father what he thinks of me. Poor old gentleman, I expect he's crying like anything this minute without his Biddy to coddle him. He said I wanted polishing, and so he sent me here. I have never been in England before, and I don't at all know if I will like it. By the way, what's your name? I didn't quite catch it."

"Janet May. This is the schoolroom where the

sixth form girls do their lessons. We have a desk each, of course. That room inside there is for the fifth form. I wonder which you will belong to? How old are you?"

"Now, how old would you think? Just you give a guess. Let me stand in front of you, so that you can take a squint at me. Now, then—oh, I say, stop a minute, I see some more girls coming in. Come along, girls, and help Miss May to guess my age. Now, then, now then, I wonder who'll be right? How you do all stare! I feel uncommonly as if I'd like to dance the Irish jig!"

Dorothy, Ruth, and Olive had now come into the schoolroom, and had taken their places by Janet's side. She gave them a quick look, in which considerable aversion to the newcomer was plainly visible, then turned her head and gazed languidly out of the window.

Bridget O'Hara bestowed upon the four girls who stood before her a lightning glance of quizzical inquiry. She was a tall, fully developed girl, and no one could doubt her claim to beauty who looked at her even for a moment.

Her eyes were of that peculiar, very dark, very deep blue, which seems to be an Irish girl's special gift. Her eyelashes were thick and black, her complexion a fresh white and pink, her chestnut hair grew in thick, curly abundance all over her well-shaped head. Her beautifully cut lips wore a petulant but charming expression. There was a provocative, almost teasing, self-confidence about her, which to certain minds only added to her queer fascination.

"Now, how old am I?" she asked, stamping her arched foot. "Don't be shy, any of you. Begin at the

eldest, and guess right away. Now then, Miss Collingwood—you see, I know your name—the age of your humble servant, if *you* please."

Dorothy could not restrain her laughter.

"How can I possibly tell you, Miss O'Hara?" she replied. "You are a tall girl. Perhaps you are seventeen, although you look more."

"Oh! hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! What will my dear dad say when I tell him that? Biddy O'Hara seventeen! Don't I wish I were! Oh, the lovely balls I'd be going to if those were my years! Now, another guess. It's your turn now—you, little brown one there—I haven't caught your name, darling. Is it Anne or Mary? Most girls are called either Anne or Mary."

"My name is Ruth," replied the girl so addressed, "and I can't guess ages. Come, Olive, let us find our French lessons and go."

"Oh, I declare, the little dear is huffed about something! Well, then, I'll tell. *I'll be fifteen in exactly a month from now!* What do you say to that? I'm well grown, am I not, Janet?"

"Did you speak?" asked Miss May in her coldest tones.

"Yes, darling, I did. Shall we go into the common room now? I'm dying to see it."

"I'm afraid I have no more time to show you any of the house this evening," answered Janet. "The common room is very much the shape of this one, only without the desks. I have some of my studies to look over, so I must wish you good-evening."

Bridget O'Hara's clear blue eyes were opened a little wider apart.

For the first time there was a faint hesitation in her manner.

"But Mrs. Freeman said——" she began.

"That I was to take you round and introduce you to a few companions," continued Janet hastily. "Miss Collingwood, Miss O'Hara—Miss Moore, Miss O'Hara —Miss Bury, Miss O'Hara. Now I have done my duty. If you like to see the common room for yourself, you can go straight through this folding door, turn to your left, see a large room directly facing you; go into it, and you will find yourself in the common room. Now, good-night."

Janet turned away, and a moment later reached the door of the schoolroom, where she was joined by Olive and Ruth. "Come," she said to them, and the three girls disappeared, only too glad to vent their feelings in the passage outside the schoolroom. Dorothy Collingwood lingered behind her companions. "Never mind," she said to Biddy, "it is rude of Janet to leave you, but she is sometimes a little erratic in her movements. It is a way our Janey has, and of course no one is silly enough to mind her."

"You don't suppose I mind her?" exclaimed Bridget. "Rudeness always shows ill-breeding, but it is still more ill-bred to notice it—at least, that's what papa says. She spoke rather as if she did not like me, which is quite incomprehensible, for everybody loves me at home."

There was a plaintive note in the girl's voice, a wistful expression in her eyes, which went straight to Dorothy's kind heart.

"People will like you here too," she said. "I am certain you are very good-natured; come and let me

show you some of our snug little arrangements in the common room, and then I think it will be time for bed."

"Oh, never mind about bed—I'm not the least sleepy."

"But Mrs. Freeman wants you to go to bed early to-night."

"Poor old dear! But wanting Biddy O'Hara to do a thing, and making her do it, are two very different matters. I'll go to bed when I'm tired—papa never expected me to go earlier at home. I declare I feel quite cheerful again now that I have got to know you, Dorothy. Janet is not at all to my taste, but you are. What a pretty name you have, and you have an awfully sweet expression—such a dear, loving kind of look in your eyes. Would you mind very much if I gave you a hug?"

"I don't mind your kissing me, Bridget, only does not it seem a little soon—I have not known you many minutes yet?"

"Oh, you darling, what do minutes signify when one loves? There, Dolly, I have fallen in love with you, and that's the fact. You shall come and stay with me at the Castle in the summer, and I'll teach you to fire a gun and to land a salmon. Oh, my dear, what larks we'll have together! I'm so glad you're taking me round this house, instead of that stiff Janet."

Dorothy suppressed a faint sigh, took her companion's plump hand, and continued the tour of investigation.

The common room to which she conducted Miss O'Hara was entirely for the use of the elder girls; the girls of the middle and the lower school had other

rooms to amuse themselves in. But this large, luxuriously furnished apartment was entirely given up to the sixth and fifth-form schoolgirls.

The room was something like a drawing room, with many easy-chairs and tables. Plenty of light streamed in from the lofty windows, and fell upon knickknacks and brackets, on flowers in pots—in short, on the many little possessions which each individual girl had brought to decorate her favorite room.

"We are each of us allowed a certain freedom here," said Dorothy. "You see these panels? It is a great promotion to possess a panel. All the girls who are allowed to have the use of this room cannot have one, but the best of us can. Now behold! Open sesame! Shut your eyes for a minute—you can open them again when I tell you. Now—you may look now."

Bridget opened her eyes wide, and started at the transformation scene which had taken place during the brief moment she had remained in darkness. The room was painted a pale, cool green. The walls were divided into several panels. One of these had now absolutely disappeared, and in its place was a deep recess, which went far enough back into the wall to contain shelves, and had even space sufficient for a chair or two, a sewing machine, and one or two other sacred possessions.

"This is my panel," said Dorothy, "and these are my own special pet things. I bring out my favorite chair when I want to use it, or to offer it to a guest; I put it back when I have done with it. See these shelves, they hold my afternoon tea set, my books, my paint box, my workbasket, my photographic album—in short, all my dearest treasures."

"I must have a cupboard like that," said Biddy. "Why, it's perfectly delicious!"

"Yes; you have got to earn it first, however," replied Miss Collingwood, slipping back the pale green panel with a dexterous movement.

"Earn it—how? Do you mean pay extra for it? Oh, that can be easily managed—I'll write to papa at once. He has heaps of money, even though he is Irish, and he can deny me nothing. He's paying lots more for me than most of the girls' fathers pay for them. That's why I have a room to myself, and why I am to have riding lessons, and a whole heap of things. But I mean to share all my little comforts with you, you darling. Oh, if the cupboard is to be bought, I'll soon have one. Now let us sit in this cosy, deep seat in the window, and put our arms round one another and talk."

The great clock in the stable struck nine.

"Don't you hear the clock?" exclaimed Dorothy, unconscious relief coming into her tones.

"Yes, what a loud, metallic sound! We have such a dear old eight-day clock at the Castle; it's said to be quite a hundred years old, and I'm certain it's haunted. My dear Dolly, to hear that clock boom forth the hour at midnight would make the stoutest heart quail."

"Well, and our humble school clock ought to make your heart quail if you don't obey it, Bridget. Seriously speaking, it is my duty to counsel you, as a new girl, to go to bed at once."

"The precious love, how nicely she talks, and how I love her gentle, refined words. But, darling, I'm not going to bed, for I'm not tired."

"But Mrs. Freeman said——"

"Dolly, I will clap my hands over your rosebud lips

if you utter another word. Come, and let us sit in this deep window-seat and be happy. Would you like to know what papa is doing at the Castle now?"

"I don't think I ought to listen to you, Bridget."

"Yes, you ought. I'm going to give you a lovely description. Papa has had his dinner, and he's pacing up and down on the walk which hangs over the lake. He is smoking a meerschaum pipe, and the dogs are with him."

"The dogs?" asked Dorothy, interested in spite of herself.

"Yes, poor old Dandy, who is so lame and so affectionate, and Mustard and Pepper, the dear little snappers, and Lemon. Poor darling, he is a trial; we have called him Lemon because he exactly resembles the juice of that fruit when it's most acrid and disagreeable. Lemon's temper is the acknowledged trial of our kennel, but he loves my father, and always paces up and down with him in the evening on the south walk. Then of course there's Bruin, he's an Irish deerhound, and the darling of my heart, and there's Pilate, the blind watchdog—oh! and Minerva. I think that's about all. We have fox hounds, of course, but they are not let out every day. I see my dear father now looking down at the lake, and talking to the dogs, and thinking of me. O Dolly, Dolly, I'm lonely, awfully lonely! Do pity me—do love me! O Dolly, my heart will break if no one loves me!"

Bridget's excitable eager words were broken by sobs; tears poured out of her lovely eyes, her hands clasped Dorothy's with fervor.

"Love me," she pleaded; "do love me, for I love you."

It would have been impossible for a much colder heart than Dorothy Collingwood's to resist her.

"Yes, I will love you," she replied; "but please go to bed now, dear. You really will get into trouble if you don't, and it seems such a pity that you should begin your school life in disgrace."

"Well, if I must go, and if you really wish it. Come with me to my room, Dorothy. O Dolly, if you would sleep with me to-night!"

"No, I can't do that; we have to obey rules at school, and one of our strictest rules is that no girl is to leave her own bedroom without special permission."

"Then go and ask, darling. Find Mrs. Freeman, and ask her; it's so easily done."

"I cannot go, Bridget. Mrs. Freeman would not give me leave, and she would be only annoyed at my making such a foolish proposition."

"Oh, foolish do you call it?" A passing cloud swept over Bridget O'Hara's face. It quickly vanished, however; she jumped up with a little sigh.

"I don't think I shall like school," she said, "but I'll do anything you wish me to do, dearest Dorothy."

CHAPTER III.

RIBBONS AND ROSES.

DOROTHY shared the same bedroom as Ruth and Olive. Each girl, however, had a compartment to herself, railed in by white dimity curtains, which she could draw or not as she pleased. Dorothy's compartment was the best in the room; it contained a large window looking out over the flower garden, and commanding a good view of the sea. She was very particular about her pretty cubicle, and kept it fresh with flowers, which stood in brackets against the walls.

Ruth and Olive slept in the back part of the room. They had a cubicle each, of course, but they had not Dorothy's taste, and their little bedrooms had a dowdy effect beside hers.

They were both undressing when she entered the room this evening, but the moment she appeared they rushed to her and began an eager torrent of words.

"Well, Dolly, have you got rid of that horrible incubus of a girl at last? What a trial she will be in the school! she's the most ill-bred creature I ever met in my life. What can Mrs. Freeman mean by taking her in? Of course, she cannot even pretend to be a lady."

"And there's such a fuss made about her, too," interrupted Olive. "A carriage and pair sent to meet her, forsooth, and a separate room for the darling to sleep in. It was good-natured of you to stay with her, Dolly;

I assure you Ruth, and Janet, and I could not have borne another moment of her society."

"She's not so bad at all," began Dorothy.

"Oh, oh, oh! if you're going to take her part, that is the last straw."

"I shan't allow her to be persecuted," said Dorothy, with some firmness. "She's the most innocent creature I ever met in my life. Fancy a girl of her age, who has simply never had a rebuff, who has been petted, loved, made much of all her days, who looks at you with the absolute fearlessness of a baby, and talks out her mind as contentedly and frankly as a bird sings its song. I grant she's an anomaly, but I'm not going to be the one to teach her how cruel the world can be."

"Oh, *if* you take it up in that way," said Olive; but her words had a faint sound about them—she was a girl who was easily impressed either for good or evil.

If Dorothy chose to take the new girl's part, she supposed there was something in her, and would continue to suppose so until she had a conversation with Janet, or anyone else, who happened to have diametrically opposite opinions to Dorothy Collingwood.

Dorothy went into her own little cubicle, drew her white dimity walls tight, and, standing before the window, looked out at the summer landscape.

She had to own to herself that Bridget had proved a very irritating companion. She would take her part, of course; but she felt quite certain at the same time that she was going to be a trial to her. As she stood by her window now, however, a little picture of the scene which the Irish girl had described so vividly presented itself with great distinctness before Dorothy's eyes.

She saw the wild landscape, the steep gravel path

which overhung the lake, the old squire with his white hair, and tall but slightly bent figure, pacing up and down, smoking his pipe and surrounded by his dogs. Dorothy fancied how, on most summer evenings, Bridget, impetuous, eager, and beautiful, walked by his side. She wondered how he had brought himself to part with her. She gave a little sigh as she shut the picture away from her mind, and as she laid her head on her pillow, she resolved to be very kind to the new girl.

Breakfast was at eight o'clock at Mulberry Court. The girls always assembled a quarter of an hour before breakfast in the little chapel for prayers. They were all especially punctual this morning, for they wanted to get a good peep at Miss O'Hara.

She was not present, however, and did not, indeed, put in an appearance in the breakfast room until the meal was half over.

She entered the room, then, in a long white embroidered dress, looped up here, there, and everywhere with sky-blue ribbons. It was a charming toilet, and most becoming to its wearer, but absolutely unsuitable for schoolroom work.

"How do you do, Mrs. Freeman?" said Bridget. "I'm afraid I'm a little late; I overslept myself, and then I could not find the right belt for this dress—it ought to be pale blue to match the ribbons, ought it not? But as I could not lay my hand on it, I have put on this silver girdle instead. Look at it, is it not pretty? It is real solid silver, I assure you; Uncle Jack brought it me from Syria, and the workmanship is supposed to be very curious. It's a trifle heavy, of course, but it keeps my dress nice and tight, don't you think so?"

"Yes, Bridget, very nice—go and take your place, my dear. There, beside Janet May. Another morning I hope you will be in time for prayers. Of course, we make all allowances the first day. Take your place directly, breakfast is half over."

Bridget raised her brows the tenth of an inch. The faintest shadow of surprise crossed her sweet, happy face. Then she walked down the long room, nodding and smiling to the girls.

"How do you do, all of you?" she said. "Well, Janet, good-morning"; she tapped Janet's indignant back with her firm, cool hand, and dropped into her place.

"Now, what shall I eat?" she said. "By the way, I hope there's a nice breakfast, I'm awfully hungry. Oh, eggs! I like eggs when they're *very* fresh. Mrs. Freeman, are these new laid? do you keep your own fowls? Father and I wouldn't touch eggs at the Castle unless we were quite sure that they were laid by Sally, Sukey, or dear old Heneypeney."

A titter ran down the table at these remarks; Mrs. Freeman bent to pick up her pocket handkerchief, and Miss Delicia, rushing to Bridget's side, began to whisper vigorously in her ear.

"It is not the custom at school, my dear child, to make remarks about what we eat. We just take what is put before us. Here's a nice piece of bacon, dear, and some toast. Don't say anything more, I beg, or you will annoy Mrs. Freeman."

"Shall I really—how unfortunate; but she doesn't look a bad-tempered woman, and what is there in wishing for fresh eggs? Stale eggs aren't wholesome."

"Do try not to make such a fool of yourself," repeated Janet, angrily, in her ear.

Bridget turned and looked at her companion in slow wonder. Janet's remark had the effect of absolutely silencing her; she ate her bacon, munched her toast, and drank off a cup of hot coffee in an amazingly short time, then she jumped up, and shook the crumbs of her meal on to the floor.

"I've had enough," she said, nodding to Mrs. Freeman in her bright way. "I'm going out into the garden now, to pick some roses."

Bridget's movements were so fleet that the head mistress had no time to intercept her; there was a flash of a white dress disappearing through the open window, and that was all.

The eyes of every girl in the room were fixed eagerly on their mistress; they were all round with wonder, lips were slightly parted. The girls felt that a volcano had got into their midst, an explosion was imminent. This feeling of electricity in the air was very exciting; it stirred the somewhat languid pulses of the schoolgirls. Surely such an impulsive, such a daring, such an impertinent, and yet such a bewitching girl had never been heard of before. How sweet she looked in her white dress, how radiant was her smile. Those pearly white teeth of hers, those gleaming, glancing eyes, that soft voice that could utter such saucy words; oh! no wonder the school felt interested, and raised out of itself.

"My dears," said Mrs. Freeman, answering the looks on all faces, "your young companion's extraordinary conduct can only be explained by the fact that she has never been at school before. I am going out to the garden to speak to her. You girls will now go as usual to your separate schoolrooms and commence study."

"Come, my dears," said Miss Patience to the girls

near her, "let us lose no more valuable time. Please don't scrape your chair in that atrocious way, Alice. Rose, *what* a poke! Susie, hold back your shoulders. Now, young ladies, come to the schoolroom quietly; quietly, if you please."

Miss Patience had a thin voice, and her words fell like tiny drops of ice on the girl's excited hearts. They followed their teachers with a certain sense of flatness, and with very little desire to attend to French verbs and German exercises.

Dorothy Collingwood ran after Mrs. Freeman.

"Please remember——" she began.

"What is it, my dear?" The head mistress drew herself slightly up, and looked in some surprise at her pupil.

"I ought not to speak," said Dorothy, turning very red, "but if you are going to be hard on Bridget——"

"Am I ever hard to my pupils, my love?"

"No, no—do forgive me!"

"I think I understand you, Dorothy," said Mrs. Freeman. "Kiss me!"

Miss Collingwood was turning away, when her mistress stretched out her hand and drew her back.

"I shall look to you to help me with this wild Irish girl," she said with a smile. "Now, go to your lessons, my dear."

Dorothy ran away at once, and Mrs. Freeman walked down the garden in the direction where she had just seen a white dress disappearing.

She called Bridget's name, but the wind, which was rather high this morning, carried her voice away from the young girl, who was gayly flitting from one rose-

bush to another, ruthlessly pulling the large, full-blown flowers with buds attached.

"I don't think I ever felt my temper more irritated," murmured the good lady under her breath. "Why did I undertake an Irish girl, and one who had never been from home before? Well, the deed is done now, and I must not *show* impatience, however I may *feel* it. Bridget, my dear! Bridget O'Hara! Do you hear me?"

"Yes, what is it?"

Biddy turned, arrested in her gay flight from rose-bush to rosebush.

As she cut the blossoms off, she flung them into her white skirt, which she had raised in front for the purpose. Now, as she ran to meet Mrs. Freeman, the skirt tumbled down, and the roses—red, white, and crimson—fell on the ground at her feet.

"Bridget, do look," said Mrs. Freeman; "you have trodden on that lovely bud!"

"Oh, I am sorry!"

Miss O'Hara stooped carelessly to pick it up. "Poor little bud!" she said, laying it on her hand. "But there are such a lot of you—such a lot! Still, it seems a pity to crush your sweetness out."

"It is more than a pity, Bridget," said her governess in a severe tone. "I am sorry to have to open your eyes, my dear child; but in picking any of my roses you have taken an unwarrantable liberty."

"What?" said Bridget, coloring high. "Do you mean seriously to tell me that I—I am not to pick flowers? I think I must have heard you wrong! Please say it again!"

"You are not to pick flowers, Miss O'Hara; it is against the rules of the school."

"YOU ARE NOT TO PICK THE FLOWERS."—*p.* 30.

"Oh, how very funny—how—how unpleasant. Did you tell papa about that when he arranged to send me here?"

"I did not specially mention the flowers, my dear. There are many rules in full force at Mulberry Court, and the pupils are expected to obey them all."

"How disagreeable! I can't live without flowers. I suppose papa will not expect me to stay if I don't like the place?"

"He will expect you to stay until the end of the term."

"Good gracious, why, that's weeks off! I can't live without flowers for weeks! Look here, Mrs. Freeman; is there not to be an exception made for me? Papa said, when I was coming here, that my happiness was to be the first thing considered. Don't you agree with him? Don't you wish me to be very, very happy?"

"I do, my love. But your truest happiness is not secured by giving you your own way in everything."

"Oh, but I hate self-denial, and that dreadful motto —'No cross, no crown.' I'm like a butterfly—I can't live without sunshine. Papa agrees with me that sunshine is necessary for life."

"So it is, Bridget. But you will permit me, an old woman compared to you, to point out a fact—the self-denying people are the happy ones, the selfish are the miserable. Take your own way now in your youth, sip each pleasure as it comes, turn from the disagreeables, trample on those who happen to be in your way, as you did on that rosebud just now, and you will lay up misery for yourself in the future. You will be a very wretched woman when you reach my age."

"How solemnly you speak," said Bridget, tears com-

ing slowly up and filling her eyes. "Is that a sermon? It makes me feel as if someone were walking over my grave. Why do you say things of that sort? I'm superstitious, you know. I'm very easily impressed. You oughtn't to do it—you oughtn't to frighten a stranger when she has just come over to your hard, cold sort of country."

"But, my dear child, our hearts are not cold. I assure you, Bridget, I am most anxious to win your love, and so also is Dorothy Collingwood."

"Is she? I love her—she is a sweet darling! And you really want me to love you, Mrs. Freeman? Well, then, I will. Take a hug now—there, that's comfortable."

Bridget's arms were flung impulsively round her governess's neck, and then one hand was tucked within the good lady's arm.

Mrs. Freeman could not help uttering a faint, inward sigh.

"I must break you in gradually, dear," she said. "As this is your first day at school you need not do any lessons, but you must come with me presently to the schoolroom in order that I may find out something about your attainments."

"My attainments! Good gracious, I haven't any!"

"Don't say 'good gracious,' Bridget; it's a very ugly way of expressing yourself. You have learnt something, haven't you?"

"Learnt something? I should rather think I have. You question me on dogs, their different breeds, and their complaints! Do you know, Mrs. Freeman, what's the best thing to do for a dog if he shows signs of distemper?"

"I don't mean that sort of learning, Bridget. I mean what you acquire from books — grammar, French, music."

"I adore music; I play by ear all the old Irish jigs and the melodies. Oh, doesn't father cry when I play 'The Harp that once through Tara's Halls,' and 'She is far from the Land,' and 'The Minstrel Boy.' And oh, Mrs. Freeman, even you, though you are a bit old and stiff, could not help dancing if I strummed 'Garry Owen' for you."

"Well, my dear, you must play it for me some evening, but we don't allow *strumming* at the Court."

"Oh, good gra——! I mean, mercy Moses!"

"That's as bad as the other expression, Bridget."

"I expect I shan't be allowed to talk at all."

"Yes, you will. You'll soon learn to control your tongue and to speak in a ladylike way."

"I loathe ladylike ways."

"Now, my dear child, will you come into the house with me? I ought to be in the schoolroom now."

"Please wait one moment, Mrs. Freeman."

"Yes, my dear, what is it?"

"Are you going to be cross when you find I don't know your sort of things?"

"I hope not, Bridget."

"It will be awfully unfair if you are, for I could pose you finely on my subjects. What's the first thing to do for a dog who shows symptoms of hydrophobia? How do you land a salmon? What keeps a gun from kicking? How does a dear old daddy like his pipe filled with tobacco? What is the best way to keep your seat when you ride bare-backed, and the horse runs away?

Ha, ha, I thought I'd pose you. I could have a very jolly school of my own, if I tried."

"Bridget, my dear, before you come into the schoolroom I must request that you go upstairs and change your dress."

"Change my dress! Now I really *don't* understand you. Am I to come down in my dressing-gown?"

"No. You are to take off that unsuitable afternoon costume you are now wearing, and put on a neat print dress for your morning work."

"This is the very plainest dress I possess, Mrs. Freeman; I pulled a lot out of my trunk this morning to look at them. There was a sky-blue delaine with coffee lace, and a pink surah, and——"

"Spare me, my dear. I really am in too great a hurry to hear a list of your wardrobe. Is it possible that your father sent you to school with all that heap of finery, and nothing sensible to wear?"

"It wasn't father, it was Aunt Kathleen. She chose my outfit in Paris. Oh, I do think it's lovely. I do feel that it's hard to be crushed on every point."

"Well, dear, you are not to blame. I shall take you to Eastcliff this afternoon, and order some plain dresses to be made up for you."

"Oh, goodness—no, I mustn't—mercy! nor that either; oh, I—I *say*, Mrs. Freeman, don't let the new dresses be frumpy, or I'll break my heart. I do so adore looking at myself in a lovely dress."

"Come into the schoolroom with me," said Mrs. Freeman. She was wondering how it would be possible for her to keep Bridget O'Hara in her school.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN OF THE SCHOOL.

It is not an easy matter to break in a wild colt, and this was the process which had now to take place with regard to the new girl, whose eccentricities and daring, whose curious mixture of ignorance and knowledge, of affectionate sympathy and careless levity, made her at once the adored and detested of her companions.

In every sense of the word Bridget was unexpected. She had an extraordinary aptitude for arithmetic, and took a high place in the school on account of her mathematics. The word mathematics, however, she had never even heard before. She could gabble French as fluently as a native, but did not know a word of the grammar. She had a perfect ear for music, could sing like a bird, and play any air she once heard, but she could scarcely read music at all, and was refractory and troublesome when asked to learn notes.

"Just play the piece over to me," she said to her master. "I'll do it if you play it over. Yes, that's it —tum, tum, tummy, tum, tum. Oughtn't you to crash the air out a bit there? I think you ought. Yes, that's it—*isn't* it lovely? Now let me try."

Her attempts were extremely good, but when it came to laboriously struggling through her written score, all was hopeless confusion, tears, and despair.

With each fresh study Bridget showed the queer

vagaries of a really clever mind run more or less to seed. She did everything in a dramatic, excitable style —she was all on wires, scarcely ever still, laughing one moment, weeping the next; the school had never known such a time as it underwent during the first week of her residence among them.

After that period she found her place to a certain extent, made some violent friends and some active enemies, was adored by the little girls, on whom she showered lollipops, kisses, and secrets, and was disliked more or less by every girl in the sixth and fifth form, Dorothy Collingwood excepted.

All this time Miss Percival, the head girl of the school, was absent. She had been ill, and had gone home for a short change. She did not return until Bridget had been at the Court a fortnight.

By this time the preparations for the Fancy Fair were in active progress. Janet May had obtained her own wish with regard to the Committee, each member of which was allowed to choose a band of workers under herself, to make articles for the coming sale.

The Fair was the great event to which the girls looked forward, and in the first excitement of such an unusual proceeding each of them worked with a will.

Janet was the heart and soul of everything. She was a girl with a great deal of independence of character; she was not destitute of ambition—she was remarkable for common sense—she was sharp in her manner, downright in her words, and capable, painstaking, and energetic in all she did.

She was a dependable girl—clever up to a certain point, nice to those with whom she agreed, affection-

ate to the people who did not specially prize her affection.

Janet was never known to lose her temper, but she had a sarcastic tongue, and people did not like to lay themselves open to the cutting remarks which often and unsparingly fell from her lips.

She used this tongue most frequently on Bridget O'Hara, but for the first time she was met by a wondering, puzzled, good-humored, and non-comprehending gaze.

"What does Janet mean?" Bridget would whisper to her nearest companion. "*Is* she saying something awfully clever? I'm sorry that I'm stupid—I don't quite catch her meaning."

These remarks usually turned the tables against Janet May, but they also had another effect. She began to be sparing of her sharp, unkind words in Bridget's hearing. This, however, did not prevent her hating the new girl with the most cordial hatred she had ever yet bestowed upon anyone.

Bridget was a fortnight at the school, and had more or less shaken down into her place, when the evening arrived on which Miss Percival was to return.

Dorothy, Bridget, and a number of the girls of the lower school were walking up and down a broad road which led to the shore. They were talking and laughing. The smaller girls were dancing and running about in their eagerness. Some very funny proposal had undoubtedly been made, and much explosive mirth was the result.

Janet and Olive Moore were returning slowly to the house after a vigorous game of tennis. They stopped to look down at the group who surrounded Dorothy.

"We have lost her," said Olive, with a sigh.

"Lost whom?" answered Janet in her tart voice.

"Why, Dorothy Collingwood; she has gone over to the ranks of the enemy."

"What do you mean, Olive?" Olive turned and looked at Janet.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," she answered; "you know who the enemy is—at least you know who is your enemy."

"I never knew before that I had an enemy," said Janet, in her guarded voice.

Olive looked at her steadily.

"Come now, Janet," she said, "confession is good for the soul—own—now do own that you cordially hate the new girl, Bridget O'Hara."

"I'm sick of the new girl," said Janet; "if you are going to talk about her I shall go into the house; I want to look over my French preparation. M. le Comte is coming to-morrow morning, and he is so frightfully over-particular that I own I'm a little afraid of him."

"Nonsense, Janet, you know you're one of the best French scholars in the school. You won't get out of answering my question by that flimsy excuse. Don't you hate Miss O'Hara?"

"Hate her?" said Janet; "there must be a certain strength about a girl to make you hate her. I've a contempt for Bridget, but I don't rouse myself to the exertion of hating."

"Oh, well; it's all the same," said Olive. "You won't admit the feeling that animates your breast, but I know that it is there, *chérie*. Now I have got something to confess on my own account—I don't like her either."

"You have too good taste to like her, Olive, but do let us talk about something more interesting. How are you getting on with that table cover for the fair?"

"Oh, I'll come to that by and by; now about Miss O'Hara. Janet, I deny that she's weak."

"You deny that she's weak," repeated Janet. "I wonder what your idea of strength is, Olive."

"She's not learned, I admit," replied Olive, "but weak! no, she's not weak; no weak character could be so audacious, so fearless, so indifferent to her own ignorance."

"If she had any strength, she'd be ashamed of her ignorance," retorted Janet.

"I don't agree with you," answered Olive. "Strength shows itself in many forms. Miss O'Hara is pretty."

"Pretty," interrupted Janet, scorn curling her lip.

"Yes, Janet, she's pretty and she's rich, and she's destitute of fear. She is quite certain to have her own party in the school. I repeat," continued Olive, "that there is no weakness in Bridget. I grant that she is about the most irritating creature I know, but weak she is not."

"Well, well," interrupted Janet impatiently, "have your own way, Olive. Make that tiresome, disagreeable girl a female Hercules if you fancy, only cease to talk about her. That is all I have to beg."

"I must say one thing," replied Olive, "and then I will turn to a more congenial theme. I hope Evelyn Percival won't take Miss O'Hara's part. You know, Janet, what strong prejudices Evelyn has."

"Oh, don't I!" said Janet, stamping her small foot.

"And if she happens to fancy Bridget she won't mind

a word we say against her. She never does mind what anyone says. You know that, Janet."

"I know," echoed Janet, a queer angry light filling her eyes for a minute. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! What with our examinations and the Fancy Fair, and all this worry about the new girl, life scarcely seems worth living—it really doesn't."

"Poor darling!" said Olive, in a sympathetic tone. "I thought I'd tell you, Janet, that whatever happened I'd take your part."

"Thanks!" said Janet calmly.

She looked at her friend with a cool, critical eye.

Olive Moore belonged to the toadying faction in the school. Toadies, however, can be useful, and Janet was by no means above making use of Olive in case of need.

She scrutinized Olive's face now, a slightly satirical expression hovering round her somewhat thin lips.

"Thanks!" she repeated again. "If I want your help I'll ask for it, Olive. I'm going into the house now, for I really must get on with my preparation."

Janet turned away, and Olive was obliged to look out for a fresh companion to attach herself to.

She looked at the merry group on the lawn, and a desire to join them, even though of course she knew she was in no sense one of them, came over her.

She ran lightly down the grassy slope, and touched Dorothy on her arm.

"I'm here, Dolly," she said, in her rather wistful manner.

"Oh, well; it's all right for you to be here, I suppose," said Dorothy. "What were you saying, Bridget? I didn't catch that last sentence of yours."

"I was going up the staircase," continued Bridget. "I held a lighted candle in my hand. It was an awful night—you should have heard the wind howling. We keep some special windbags of our own at the Castle, and when we open the strings of one, why—well, there is a hurricane, that's all."

"Oh, she's telling a story," whispered Olive under her breath. She settled herself contentedly to listen.

"Go on; tell us quickly what you did with the candle, Biddy!" cried little Violet, pulling her new friend by the arm.

"Don't shake me so, Vi, my honey; I'm coming to the exciting place—now then. Well, as I was going up the stairs all quite lonely, and by myself, never a soul within half a mile of me——"

"But your castle isn't half a mile big," said Katie, another small girl. "And you did say your father lived there with you, and, of course, there must have been some servants."

"Well, dear, well! half a mile is a figure of speech. That's a way we have in Ireland—we figure of speech everything; it's much more graphic. Now, to go on. I was running up the stairs with my candle, and the wind rushing after me like mad, and the Castle rocking as if it were in an agony, when—— What do you think happened?"

"What?" said Katie, her eyes growing big with fascination and alarm.

"The wind dropped as if it were dead. After screeching as if it had the tongues of hundreds of Furies, it was mummer than the timidest mouse that ever crept. The Castle ceased to rock; it was the suddenest and dead-

est calm you could possibly imagine. It was miles more frightful than the storm. Just then there came a little puff of a breeze out of the solid stone wall, and out went my candle."

"O Bridget!" exclaimed the little girls, starting back in affright.

"Bridget, you are talking a great deal of nonsense," said Dorothy, "and I for one am not going to listen to you. We are much too sensible to believe in ghost stories here, and there is no use in your trying to frighten us. Good-by, all of you; I am off to the house!"

Dorothy detached herself from Bridget's clinging arm, and ran quickly up the sloping lawn.

Bridget stood and watched her. Olive kept a little apart, and the smaller girls clustered close together, watching their new friend's face with interest and admiration.

The Irish girl looked certainly pretty enough to win any number of susceptible small hearts at that moment. Her pale blue dress set off her graceful figure and fair complexion to the best advantage. Her mirthful, lovely eyes were raised to follow Dorothy as she disappeared into the house. Her lips were parted in a mischievous smile. She raised one hand to push back the rebellious locks of chestnut curls from her forehead.

"Now, Biddy, go on, Biddy!" exclaimed the children. "We love ghost stories, so do tell us more about the candle."

"No!" said Bridget. "*She* says they aren't good for you, so you shan't have them. Let's think of some more fun. Who's that new girl, who, you say, is going to arrive to-night?"

"New girl!" exclaimed Katie, "why, she's about the very oldest girl in the school—the oldest and the nicest. She's the head of the school. We call her our queen. She's not like you, Biddy, of course; but she's very nice—awfully nice!"

"And what's the darling's name?" asked Bridget.

"Evelyn Percival. Doesn't it sound pretty?"

"Faix, then, it does, honey. I'm all agog to see this lovely queen. Why has she been absent so long? Doesn't Mrs. Freeman require any lessons of the sweet creature? Oh, then, it's I that would like to be in her shoes, if that's the case."

"She has been ill, Biddy," said Violet. "Evelyn has been ill, but she is better now; she's coming back to-night. We are all glad, for we all love her."

"Let's run down the road, then, and give her a welcome," said Bridget. "In Ireland we'd take the horses off the carriage, and draw her home ourselves. Of course, we can't do that, but we might go to meet her, waving branches of trees, and we might raise a hearty shout when we saw her coming. Come along, girls—what a lark! I'll show you how we do this sort of thing in old Ireland! Come! we'll cut down boughs as we go along. Come! be quick, be quick!"

"But we are not allowed to cut the boughs, Bridget," said Katie.

"And we are not allowed to go out of the grounds by ourselves," cried several other voices.

"We are not by ourselves when we are together," replied Bridget. "Come along, girls, don't be such little despicable cowards! I'll square it with Mrs.

Freeman. You trust *me*. Mrs. Freeman will forgive us everything when the queen is coming back. Now, do let's be quick, we haven't a minute to lose!"

Small girls are easily influenced, and Bridget and her tribe rushed down the avenue, shouting and whooping as they went.

Olive had no inclination to join them. They had taken no notice of her, and she was not sufficiently fascinated by Bridget to run any risk for her sake. She knew that her present proceedings were wrong, but she was not at all brave enough to raise her voice in protest. She walked slowly back to the house, wondering whether she should go and tell Janet, or sink down lazily on a cozy seat and go on with a story book which was sticking out of her pocket.

As she was approaching the house she was met by Miss Delicia, who stopped to speak kindly to her.

"Well, my dear child," she said, "I suppose you, like all the rest of us, are on tenter hooks for our dear Evelyn's return. From the accounts we received this morning, she seems to be quite well and strong again, and it *will* be such a comfort to have her back. I don't know how it is, but the school is quite a different place when she is there."

"We'll all be delighted to have her again, of course," said Olive. "And is she really quite well, Miss Delicia?"

"Yes, my love, or she would not be returning."

Miss Delicia hurried on, intent on some housewifely mission, and Olive entering the house went down a long stone passage which led to the sixth form schoolroom.

Janet was there, busily preparing her French lesson for M. le Comte. She was a very ambitious girl, and was determined to carry off as many prizes as possible at the coming midsummer examinations. She scarcely raised her eyes when Olive appeared.

"Janet!"

"Yes, Olive; I'm very busy. Do you want anything?"

"Only to tell you that that pet of yours, Bridget O'Hara, is likely to get herself into a nice scrape. She has run down the road with a number of the small fry to meet Evelyn. They are taking boughs of trees with them, and are going to shout, or do something extraordinary, when they see her arriving. Janet, what's the matter? How queer you look!"

"I'm very busy, Olive; I wish you'd go away!"

"But you look queer. Are you frightened about anything?"

"No, no; what nonsense you talk! What is there to be frightened about? Do go; I can't learn this difficult French poetry while you keep staring at me!"

"I wish you'd say what you think about Bridget. Isn't she past enduring, getting all the little ones to disobey like this? Why, she might be expelled! Yes, Janet; yes, I'm going. You needn't look at me as if you'd like to eat me!"

Olive left the room with slow, unwilling footsteps, and Janet bent her head over the copy of Molière she was studying.

"Nothing in the world could be stupider than French poetry," she muttered. "How am I to get this into my head? What a nuisance Olive is with her stories—she

has disturbed my train of thoughts. Certainly, it's no affair of mine what that detestable wild Irish girl does. I shall always hate her, and whatever happens I can never get myself to tolerate Evelyn. Now, to get back to my poetry. I have determined to win this prize. I won't think of Evelyn and Bridget any more."

Janet bent her fair face again over the open page; a faint flush had risen in each of her cheeks.

She was beginning to collect her somewhat scattered thoughts, when the door was opened suddenly, and, to her surprise, Mrs. Freeman came into the room.

"Pardon me for disturbing you," she said; "I did not know anyone was in the schoolroom at present."

"I am looking over my French lesson, madam," answered Janet, in her respectful tones. "It's a little more difficult than usual, and I thought I'd have a quiet half hour here, trying to master it."

"Quite right, Janet, I am glad you are so industrious. I won't disturb you for more than a minute, my love. I just want to look out of this window. It is the only one that commands a view of the road from Eastcliff. Evelyn ought to be here by now."

Janet did not say any more. She bent forward, ostensibly to renew her studies, in reality to hide a jealous feeling which surged up in her heart.

What a fuss everyone *was* making about that stupid Evelyn Percival. Here was the head mistress even quite in a fume because she was a minute or two late in putting in an appearance.

It really was too absurd. Janet could not help fidgeting almost audibly.

"Janet," said Mrs. Freeman, "come here for a mo-

ment. I want you to use your young eyes. Do you see any carriage coming down the hill?"

Janet sprang from her seat with apparent alacrity.

"Look, dear," said the governess. "What is that distant speck? I am so terribly near-sighted that I cannot make out whether it is a carriage or cart of some sort."

"It is a covered wagon," said Janet. "I see it quite plainly. There is no carriage at all in view, Mrs. Freeman."

"My dear, I must tell you that I am a little anxious. Hickman took that shying horse, Caspar, to bring Evelyn home. I intended Miss Molly to have been sent for her. Dear Evelyn is still so nervous after her bad illness that I would not for the world have her startled in any way. And really, Caspar gets worse and worse. What is the matter, Janet? *You* have started now."

"Nothing," replied Janet. "I—I—shall I run out to the front, Mrs. Freeman, and listen if I can hear the carriage? You can hear it a very long way off from the brow of the hill."

"Do, my love, and call to me if you do. I would not have that dear girl frightened for the world. I am more vexed than I can say with Hickman."

Janet ran out of the room. Her heart was beating hard and fast. Should she tell Mrs. Freeman what Olive had just confided to her, that Bridget and a number of the smaller children of the school had rushed down the road to meet Evelyn, carrying boughs in their hands, and doubtless shouting loudly in their glee?

Caspar was a sensitive horse; even Janet, who had

no physical fear about her, disliked the way he started, and shied sometimes at his own shadow. It was scarcely likely that he would bear the shock which all those excited children would give him.

Oh, yes, she ought to tell; and yet—and yet——

She stood wavering with her own conscience. Caspar was nervous, but he was not vicious.

All that could possibly happen would be a little fright for Evelyn, and a larger measure of disgrace for Bridget. And why should Janet interfere? Why should she tell tales of her schoolfellows? Her story would be misinterpreted by that faction of the girls who already had made Bridget their idol.

No, there was nothing to be alarmed about. Evelyn was too silly, with her nerves and her fads. Janet stood by the bend of the hill. Her thoughts were so busy that she scarcely troubled herself to listen for the approaching carriage.

She stood for a minute or two, then walked slowly back to the window, out of which her schoolmistress leaned.

"I don't hear any sound whatever, Mrs. Freeman," she said, "but please don't be alarmed; Evelyn's train may have been late."

"Hark! Stop talking!" said Mrs. Freeman.

There was a sound, a commotion. Several steps were heard; eager voices were raised in expostulation and distress.

"Let me go," said the head mistress.

She stepped out of the open window, and walked rapidly across the wide gravel sweep.

Alice, Violet, and several more of the little girls were running and tumbling up the grassy slope.

"BRIDGET WAS SITTING . . . WITH A GIRL'S HEAD ON HER LAP."—*p.* 49.

The moment they saw Mrs. Freeman they ran to her.

"Oh, come at once!" said Violet, "there has been an accident, and Evelyn is hurt. Bridget is with her. Come, come at once!"

The child's words were almost incoherent. Alice, who was not quite so excitable, began to pour out a queer story.

"I know we've all been awfully naughty, but we didn't think Caspar would mind the boughs. He turned sharp round and something happened to the wheels of the carriage—and—and—oh, Mrs. Freeman, do come. I think Evelyn must be dead, she's lying so still."

"Are you there, Janet?" said Mrs. Freeman. "Go into the house, and ask Miss Patience to follow me down the road. And see that someone goes for Dr. Hart. Alice, you can come back with me. The rest of the little girls are to go into the playroom, and to stay there until I come to them."

Mrs. Freeman spoke calmly, but there was a look about her face which gave Janet a very queer sensation. The schoolmistress took Alice's hand, and walked as quickly as she could to the scene of the accident.

The carriage lay smashed a couple of hundred yards from the gates of the avenue.

Bridget was sitting in the middle of the dusty road with a girl's head on her lap. The girl's figure was stretched out flat and motionless; her hat was off, and Bridget was pushing back some waves of fair hair from her temples.

"It's all my fault, Mrs. Freeman," said Bridget O'Hara, looking up with a tear-stained face at her gov-

erness. "*I* made the children come, and *I* made them cut the branches off the trees, and we ran, and shouted as we ran. I didn't think it would do any harm, it was all a joke, and to welcome her, for they said she was the queen, but no one is to blame in all the wide world but me."

"Oh, what a wicked girl you are," said Mrs. Freeman, roused out of her customary gentle manner by the sight of Evelyn's motionless form. "I can't speak to you at this moment, Bridget O'Hara; go away, leave Evelyn to me. Evelyn, my darling, look at me, speak to me—say you are not hurt!"

When Mrs. Freeman told Bridget to go away and leave her, the Irish girl stopped playing with the tendrils of hair on Evelyn's forehead, and looked at her governess with a blank expression stealing over her face.

She did not attempt to rise to her feet, however, and Mrs. Freeman was far too much absorbed to take any further notice of her.

"If I had only some smelling salts," she began.

Bridget slipped her hand into her pocket, and pulled out an exquisitely embossed viniagrette.

The governess took it without a word, and opening it applied it to Evelyn's nostrils.

After two or three applications the injured girl stirred faintly, a shade of color came into her cheeks, and she opened her eyes.

"There, thank Heaven, I haven't killed her!" exclaimed Bridget.

She burst into sudden frantic weeping.

"I believe I am more frightened than hurt," said Miss Percival, struggling to sit up, and smiling at Mrs. Freeman. "I'm so awfully sorry that I've lost my

nerve. Where am I? what has happened? I only remember Caspar turning right round and looking at me, and some people shouting, and then the carriage went over, and I cannot recall anything more. But I don't think—no—I am sure I am not seriously hurt."

"Thank God for that, my darling," said Mrs. Freeman. She put her arm round the young girl, kissed her tenderly, and drew her away from Bridget.

CHAPTER V.

BREAKING IN A WILD COLT.

MISS PERCIVAL'S accident, and Bridget O'Hara's share in it, were the subjects of conversation not only that night, but the next morning.

The doctor had come to see Evelyn, had pronounced her whole in limb, and not as much shaken by her fall out of her carriage as might have been expected. After prescribing a day in bed, and all absence of excitement, he went away, promising to look in again in a few days.

Mrs. Freeman breathed a sigh of relief.

"And now," she said, turning to her two sisters, "the question of questions is this: what is to be done with Bridget O'Hara? Is she to continue at Mulberry Court after such a daring act of disobedience? Must the safety of the other scholars be sacrificed to her?"

"I'd punish her very severely," said Miss Patience. "I am sure punishment is what she wants. She ought to be broken in."

"I don't believe you'll ever drive her," said Miss Delicia. "I know that sort of character. It's only hardened when it's driven."

"I shall do nothing to-night," said Mrs. Freeman. "But to-morrow, after morning school, I must speak to Bridget. Her conduct during that interview will more or less decide what steps I must take."

The next morning, after breakfast, Mrs. Freeman went upstairs to sit with her favorite Evelyn.

Evelyn Percival, the head girl of the school, was now between seventeen and eighteen years of age. She was a rather pale, rather plain girl; her forehead was broad and low, which gave indications of thoughtfulness more than originality; her wide open gray eyes had a singularly sweet expression; they were surrounded by dark eyelashes, and were the best features in a face which otherwise might have appeared almost insignificant.

But plain as Evelyn undoubtedly was, no one who knew her long ever remarked about her appearance, or gave a second thought to the fact that she could lay small claim to physical beauty.

There was a spirit that shone out of those gray eyes, and lent sweetness to that mouth, which was in itself so beautiful that it radiated all over Evelyn, and gave her that strong fascination which those who are striving heavenward ever possess.

She never came into a room without exercising in a silent, unobtrusive, very gentle way, a marked effect for good.

Uncharitable talk about others ceased when Evelyn drew near. Selfishness slunk away ashamed.

All the other girls in the school tried to be good when Evelyn was by, not because she would reproach them, but because she had a certain way about her which made goodness so attractive that they were forced to follow it.

She was not a specially clever girl, nevertheless she was now, in virtue of her seniority, and a certain painstaking determination, which made her capable of mastering her studies, at the head of the school.

There are some jealous people who dislike the beautiful because they are beautiful, the good because they are good. Girls with this special character are to be found in every school. Janet May was one of them, but perhaps in the whole of Mulberry Court she was the only person who at this juncture cordially disliked Evelyn Percival.

"It is delightful to have you back again," said Mrs. Freeman, bending over her pupil and kissing her. "And really, Evelyn, you look almost well. Oh, my dear child, what a fright I got about you last night."

"But I'm all right to-day," said Evelyn, in her bright voice. "I don't feel any bad effects whatever from my accident. I can't think why I was so stupid as to faint, and give you a fright. I ought really to have more control over my nerves."

"My dear, you have been ill, which accounts for your nervousness. But in any case a person with the stoutest nerves may be pardoned for fainting if she is flung out of a carriage. I cannot imagine how you escaped as you have done."

"I feel quite well," replied Evelyn, "quite well, and disinclined to stay in bed. I want to get up and see all my friends. You don't know how I have been looking forward to this."

"You shall see the girls one at a time in your room, darling, for whether you feel well or not, the doctor wishes you to remain quiet to-day."

Evelyn gave a very faint sigh, and turning her head looked out of the window.

Mrs. Freeman went over and drew back the curtains.

"You can watch the sea from your bed, my dear," she said, "and I will send Dorothy to sit with you after

morning school. Now I want to ask you if you can give any idea of how the accident occurred?"

A slight additional color came into Miss Percival's cheeks.

"Caspar shied at something," she said.

"Yes, but at what?"

"Well, Mrs. Freeman, you know how fond the children are of me, and I of them. They came to meet me, several of the little ones, and one tall, beautiful girl, whom I do not know. Perhaps they were all overexcited. They shouted a good deal, and waved branches of trees. Poor Caspar evidently could not stand it; but they really did nothing that anyone could blame them about."

"Nonsense, Evelyn. They disobeyed my most stringent orders. Are they not to be blamed for that?"

"Hadn't they got leave to come to meet me?"

"No, it was that wild Irish girl's doing. I really don't know what to do with her."

"Is she the beautiful girl who was the ringleader? I don't think I ever saw anyone with such presence of mind. She absolutely caught me as I was flung out of the carriage. I felt her arms round me; that was why I was not hurt."

"Yes, I am sure she has a good deal of physical courage, but that does not alter the fact of her having defied my authority and led the children into mischief."

"Poor girl!" said Evelyn, a wistful expression coming into her eyes.

"Now, my dear, you are not going to plead for her. I must manage her my own way. I will leave you now, Evelyn. Rest all you can, dear, and if you are very good you may perhaps be allowed to join us at supper."

Mrs. Freeman left her pupil's room, and went downstairs.

Evelyn Percival was one of the few girls in the school who was privileged to have a room to herself. Her little room was prettily draped in white and pink. It was called the Pink Room, and adjoined the Blue Room, which was occupied by Bridget O'Hara.

On her way downstairs Mrs. Freeman stepped for a moment into Bridget's room. Her pupil's large traveling trunks had been removed to the box room, but many showy dresses and much finery of various sorts lay scattered about.

Bridget was evidently not blessed with the bump of order. Valuable rings and bracelets lay, some on the mantelpiece, some on the dressing table; ribbons, scarfs, handkerchiefs, littered the chairs, the chest of drawers, and even the bed. A stray stocking poked its foot obtrusively out of one of the over-packed drawers of the wardrobe. Photographs of friends and of scenery lay face downward on the mantelpiece, and kept company with Bridget's brushes and combs in her dressing-table drawer.

Mrs. Freeman was very particular with regard to tidiness, and the condition of this very pretty room filled her with grave displeasure. The rules with regard to tidy rooms, neatly kept drawers, a place for everything and everything in its place, were most stringent at Mulberry Court, but up to the present rules mattered nothing at all to Bridget O'Hara.

"There is nothing whatever for it," murmured Mrs. Freeman; "I must punish the poor child in a way she will really feel. If this fails, and I cannot break her in

before the end of the term, I must ask her father to remove her."

Mrs. Freeman sighed as she said these words.

She went downstairs and entered her own private sitting room. It was now half-past eleven o'clock, and morning school was over. The weather was too hot for regular walks, and the girls were disporting themselves according to their own will and pleasure on the lawns and in the beautiful grounds which surrounded the school.

Mrs. Freeman could see them as she sat in her sitting room.

Janet, accompanied by Olive and Ruth, was pacing slowly backward and forward under some shady trees. Her satellites were devoted to her, and Janet's slender figure was very erect, and her manner somewhat dictatorial. Dorothy Collingwood was not to be seen, she had evidently gone to join Evelyn upstairs. The girls of the middle school were preparing to exert themselves over more than one tennis match. The smaller children were going down to the shore.

Bridget, her hat hanging on her arm, defiance very marked on her brow, came suddenly into view. She was alone, and Mrs. Freeman noticed that Janet and her two companions stopped to look at her as if they rather enjoyed the spectacle. They paused for a moment, stared rudely, then turned their backs on Miss O'Hara.

Bridget wore a white muslin dress with a long train. Her silver girdle was clasped round her waist. She went deliberately up to a rose tree in full flower, and, picking two or three half-opened buds, put them in her girdle.

Mrs. Freeman got up, and sounded an electric bell in the wall.

When the servant answered her summons, she desired her to ask Miss O'Hara to come to her immediately.

In about ten minutes' time Bridget came into the room without knocking. Her hat was still swinging on her arm; there was a wild-rose color on her cheeks; her eyes had a certain excited, untamed gleam in them.

"Did you want me, Mrs. Freeman?" she said, in her lazy, rich, somewhat impertinent voice.

"I certainly want you, Bridget. I am not in the habit of sending for my pupils if I don't wish to speak to them."

Bridget uttered a faint sigh.

"Well, I'm here," she said; "what is it?" She still used that half-mocking, indifferent voice.

Mrs. Freeman could scarcely restrain her impatience.

"I'm afraid I have some unpleasant things to talk about, Miss O'Hara," she said. "But, before I begin, I must distinctly request you to remember that you are a young girl in the presence of the lady who has been appointed by your father to guide, direct, and command you."

"Command me?" said Bridget, her nostrils dilating.

"Yes; does not a mistress always command her pupils?"

"When she can," replied Bridget. Her hands dropped to her sides. She lowered her eyes; her proud lips were firmly shut.

After a little pause, during which neither mistress nor pupil spoke, the pupil raised her head.

"I hate school," she said. "I want to go back to the Castle. Can I go to-day?"

"No, Bridget, you cannot. You have been sent here to be under my care, and you must remain with me at least until the end of the term."

"When will that be?"

"Not for over a month?"

"Couldn't you write to father, Mrs. Freeman, and tell him that I am not happy? Say, 'Biddy is not happy, and she wants to go back to you and the dogs.' If you say that, he'll let me come home fast enough. You might write by the next post, and father, he'd jump on the jaunting-car and drive into Ballyshannon, and send you a wire. If papa wires to you, Mrs. Freeman, the very moment he gets your letter, I may perhaps be home on Sunday."

Bridget's changeful face was now all glowing with excitement, eagerness, and hope. Her defiant attitude had vanished. As she looked full at Mrs. Freeman, her governess noticed for the first time that her eyelids were red, as if she had been crying. That, and a certain pathos in her voice, made the head mistress regard her in a new light.

"My dear," she said, "I cannot grant your request. You have been sent to me by your father. He wishes you to stay here as long as you are well in body. You are quite well, Bridget; you must therefore make up your mind, whether you like school or whether you hate it, to remain here until the end of the term."

"Very well, if it must be so, but I shall be very miserable, and misery soon makes me ill."

"You were not miserable yesterday."

"No, not very. The younger girls were fond of me, and Dorothy Collingwood was nice."

"And isn't she nice to-day?"

"*No* one is nice to-day. There's the most ridiculous, unfair fuss being made about nothing. There isn't a single girl in the school who hasn't turned against me,

because of the accident last night to that stupid, plain Miss Percival. If I'd hurt her, or if she were ill, and in the least pain, I'd be as sorry as the rest of them; but she's not in the slightest pain; she's quite well. I can't understand all this fuss."

"Can't you, Bridget? I'm afraid I must make you understand that the fact of Evelyn being uninjured does not alter your conduct."

"My conduct? What *have* I done?"

"You have disobeyed me. One of my strictest rules forbids the girls to leave the grounds without permission. You not only left the grounds contrary to my express order, but you took several of the little children of the school with you. It is against my orders to have the trees destroyed by breaking off branches. Knowing this, you willfully disobeyed me again, and you and your companions rushed down the road shouting wildly. What was the result? Evelyn Percival mercifully escaped serious injury, but my carriage was broken and my horse damaged. The mere money loss you have occasioned me, Bridget——"

"Oh, papa'll pay that! Don't you fret about that, Mrs. Freeman; the dear old dad will settle it. He quite loves writing checks!"

"But your father cannot pay for your disobedience —for the bad example you have set the little children, for the pain and anxiety you have given me."

"Pain and anxiety! I like that! You are just angry with me—that's about all!"

"I am sorry for you also, my dear. I earnestly desire that you should be a good girl, for the girl is the mother of the woman, and a good girl makes that admirable and priceless treasure—a good woman by and by."

Bridget moved restlessly. She looked out of the window. The sun was shining brilliantly, and the grass under the big shady trees looked particularly inviting.

"I suppose I may go," she said, "if that's all you have got to say?"

"I have some more things to say. I must get you, Bridget, before you leave this room, to make a promise."

"What is that?"

"That you will obey me."

"I don't know how I can, Mrs. Freeman. I said at once, when I came to school and saw what kind of place it was, that I wouldn't obey the rules. They were so tiresome and silly; I didn't see the use of them."

"Bridget, you are incorrigible. If kindness won't make you see that you are bound in honor to obey me, I must try punishment. Wretched child, I don't wish to be hard to you, but do what I say, you *must!*"

Bridget's face turned very white. She looked wildly toward the door, then at the window.

Mrs. Freeman went up to her, and took her hand.

"My dear," she said, "I must make you feel my authority. I do this with great pain, for I know you have not had the advantage of the training which many of the girls who live here have received. I would treat you with kindness, Bridget, but you won't receive my kindness. Now I must be severe, but for your good. Until you promise to obey the rules of the school, you must not join your schoolfellows either at work or play. My sister Patience will allow you to sit with her in her sitting room, and your meals will be brought to you there. The length of your punishment rests with yourself, my dear."

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTIVITY.

THERE are times in life when all one's preconceived ideas are completely upset and altered. We looked at the world from a certain point of view. From that special angle of our own it showed in gold and rose color and blue. A day came when we were forced to change our vantage ground, and on that day we for the first time perceived the grays and the blacks of that same old world—it ceased to smile on us, it ceased to pet us—it ceased to say to us, "I was made to render your life beautiful, I was made to minister to every selfish desire of yours; I am your slave, you are my mistress; do with me what you will."

On this particular day the world ceases to speak in those gentle and submissive tones. With all its grays and its blacks turned full in view, it says: "You are only an atom; there are millions of other human beings to share my good things as well as my evil. After all, I am not your slave, but your mistress; I have made laws, and you have got to obey them. Up to the present I have treated you as a baby, but now I am going to show you what life really means."

It was in some such fashion that the world spoke to Bridget O'Hara on this special summer's morning.

Mrs. Freeman took her unwilling hand, led her into Miss Patience's dull little sitting room, which only

looked out upon the back yard, and, shutting the door behind her, left her to her own meditations.

"You remain here, Bridget," she repeated, "until you have promised to obey the rules of the school. No longer and no shorter will be your term of punishment. It remains altogether with yourself how soon you are liberated."

The door was closed then, and Bridget O'Hara found herself alone.

The summer sounds came in to her, for the window of her dull room was open, the birds were twittering in the trees, innumerable doves were cooing; there was the gentle, soft whisper of the breeze, the cackling of motherly hens, the lowing of cows, and, far away beyond and over them, the insistent, ceaseless whisper of the gentle waves on the shore.

Bridget stood by the window, but she heard none of these soothing sounds. Her spoilt, childish heart was in the most open state of rebellion and revolt.

She was in every sense of the word an untamed creature; she was like a wild bird who had just been caught and put into a cage.

By and by doubtless the poor bird would be taught to develop his notes into something richer and rarer than nature had made them, but the process would be painful. Bridget was like the bird, and she was beating her poor little wings now against her cage.

Her first impulse was to open the door of her prison and go boldly out.

She had not passed a pleasant morning, however, and this plan scarcely commended itself to her.

For some reason her companions, both old and young in the school, had taken upon themselves to cut her.

In all her life Bridget had never been cut before.

At the dear old wild Castle in Ireland she had been idolized by everyone, the servants had done her bidding, however extravagant and fanciful that bidding had been. She led her old father where she wished with silken reins. The dogs, the horses, even the cows and the calves, followed Bridget like so many faithful shadows. In short, this wild little girl was the beloved queen of the Castle. To cut her, or show her the smallest incivility, would have been nothing short of high treason.

This morning Bridget had been practically "sent to Coventry." Even Dorothy was cold in her manner to her. The small children who had hung upon her words and followed her with delight the evening before, were now too frightened at the consequences of their own daring to come near her. Janet, Ruth, and Olive had shown their disapproval by marked avoidance and covert sneers. Bridget had done a very naughty act, and the school thought it well to show its displeasure.

There was little use, therefore, in rushing out of her prison to join her companions in their playground or on the shore.

Should she run away altogether? Should she walk to Eastcliff and take the next train to London, and then, trusting to chance, and to the kindness of strangers, endeavor to find her way back to the dear and loving shores of the old country, and so back again to the beloved home?

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she thought of this plan; but, in the first place, she had no idea how to manage it, and, what was a far more serious obstacle, her little sealskin purse, her father's last present, was empty.

Bridget could certainly not return home without money.

She sat down presently on the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands. She could only resolve on one thing—she would certainly not yield to Mrs. Freeman's request—nothing would induce her to promise to obey the rules of the school.

A story book, belonging to the school library, happened to be lying on a chair close to her own. She took it up, opened it, and began to read. The tale was sufficiently interesting to cause her to forget her troubles.

She had read for nearly an hour when the door of the room opened, and Miss Patience came in. Miss Patience was an excellent woman, but she took severe views of life; she emphatically believed in the young being trained; she thought well of punishments, and pined for the good old days when children were taught to make way for their elders, and not—as in the present degenerate times—to expect their elders to make way for them. Miss Patience just nodded toward Bridget, and, sitting beside a high desk, took out an account book and opened it. Miss O'Hara felt more uncomfortable than ever when Miss Patience came into the room; her book ceased to entertain her, and the walls of her prison seemed to get narrower. She fidgeted on her chair, and jumped up several times to look out of the window. There was nothing of the least interest, however, going on in the yard at that moment. Presently she beat an impatient tattoo on the glass with her fingers.

"Don't do that, Bridget," said Miss Patience; "you are disturbing me."

Bridget dropped back into her seat with a profound sigh. Presently the dinner gong sounded, and Miss Patience put away her papers and accounts, and shutting up her desk, prepared to leave the room. Bridget got up too. "I am glad that is dinner," she said; "I'm awfully hungry. May I go up to my room to tidy myself, Miss Patience?"

"No, Bridget, you are to stay here; your dinner will be brought to you." Bridget flushed crimson.

"I won't eat any dinner in this horrid room," she said; "I think I have been treated shamefully. If my dinner is sent to me I won't eat it."

"You can please yourself about that," said Miss Patience, in her calmest voice. She left the room, closing the door behind her.

Bridget felt a wild desire to rush after Miss Patience, and defying all punishment and all commands, appear as usual in the dining room.

Something, however, she could not tell what, restrained her from doing this. She sank back again in her chair; angry tears rose to her bright eyes, and burning spots appeared in her round cheeks.

The door was opened, and a neatly dressed servant of the name of Marshall entered, bearing a dinner tray.

She was a tall, slight girl, fairly good-looking, and not too strong-minded.

"Here, Miss O'Hara," she said good-naturedly, "here's a lovely slice of lamb; and I saved some peas for you. Them young ladies always do make a rush on the peas, but I secured some in time. I'll bring you some cherry tart presently, miss, and some whipped cream. You eat a good dinner, miss, and forget your

troubles; oh, dear! I don't like to see young ladies in punishment—and that I don't!"

While Marshall was speaking she looked down at the pretty and rebellious young prisoner with marked interest.

"I'd make it up if I was you, miss," she said.

Marshall, with all her silliness, was a shrewd observer of character. Had the girl in disgrace been Janet May or Dorothy Collingwood, she would have known far better than to presume to address her; but Bridget was on very familiar terms with her old nurse and with many of the other servants at home, and it seemed quite reasonable to her that Marshall should speak sympathetic words.

"I can't eat, Marshall," she said. "I'm treated shamefully, and the very nicest dinner wouldn't tempt me. You can take it away, for I can't possibly touch a morsel. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how I do wish I were at home again! What a horrid, horrid sort of place school is!"

"Poor young lady!" said Marshall. "Anyone can see, Miss O'Hara, as you aint accustomed to mean ways; you has your spirit, and I doubt me if anyone can break it. You aint the sort for school—ef I may make bold to say as much, you aint never been brought under. That's the first thing they does at school; under you must go, whether you likes it or not. Oh, dear, there's that bell, and it's for me—I must fly, miss—but I do, humble as I am, sympathize with you most sincere. You try and eat a bit of dinner, miss, do now—and I'll see if I can't get some asparagus for you by and by, and, at any rate, you shall have the tart and the whipped cream."

"I can't eat anything, Marshall," said Bridget, shaking her head. "You are kind; I see by your face that you are very kind. When I'm let out of this horrid prison I'll give you some blue ribbon that I have upstairs, and a string of Venetian beads. I dare say you're fond of finery."

"Oh, lor, miss, you're too good, but there's that bell again; I must run this minute."

Marshall departed, and Bridget lifted the cover from her plate and looked at the nice hot lamb and green peas.

Notwithstanding her vehement words, some decided pangs of hunger seized her as she saw the tempting food. She remembered, however, that in the old novels heroines in distress had never any appetite, and she resolved to die rather than touch food while she was treated in so disgraceful a manner.

She leant back, therefore, in her chair and reflected with a sad sort of pleasure on the sorrow which her father would feel when he learnt that she had almost died of hunger and exhaustion at this cruel school.

"He'll be sorry he sent me; he'll be sorry he listened to Aunt Kathleen," she said to herself.

A flash of self-pity filled her eyes, but there was some consolation in reflecting on the fact that no one could force her to eat against her will.

Marshall reappeared with the asparagus and cherry tart.

She gave Bridget a great deal of sympathy, adjured her to eat, shook her head over her, and having gained a promise that a pair of long suède gloves should be added to the ribbons and Venetian beads, went away,

having quite made up her mind to take Bridget's part through thick and thin.

"It's most mournful to see her, poor dear!" she muttered. "She's fat and strong and hearty, but I know by the shape of her mouth that she's that obstinate she won't touch any food, and she won't give in to obey Mrs. Freeman, not if it's ever so. I do pity her, poor dear, and it aint only for the sake of the things she gives me. Now let me see, aint there anyone I can speak to about her? Oh, there's Miss Dorothy Collingwood, she aint quite so 'aughty as the other young ladies; I think I will try her, and see ef she couldn't bring the poor dear to see reason."

The girls were leaving the dining room while these thoughts were flashing through Marshall's mind. Dorothy and Janet May were walking side by side.

"Miss Collingwood," said Marshall, in a timid whisper, "might I say a word to you, miss?"

"Yes, Marshall," said Dorothy; she stopped. Janet stopped also, and gave Marshall a freezing glance.

"We haven't a moment to lose, Dorothy," she said. "I want to speak to you alone before the rest of the committee arrive. That point with regard to Evelyn Percival must be settled. Perhaps your communication can keep, Marshall."

"No, miss, that it can't," said Marshall, who felt as she expressed it afterward, "that royled by Miss May's 'aughty ways." "I won't keep Miss Collingwood any time, miss, ef you'll be pleased to walk on."

Janet was forced to comply, and Dorothy exclaimed eagerly:

"Now, Marshall, what is it? How fussy and important you look!"

"Oh, miss, it's that poor dear young lady."

"What poor dear young lady?"

"Miss Bridget O'Hara. She aint understood, and she's in punishment, pore dear; shut up in Miss Patience's dull parlor. Mrs. Freeman don't understand her. She aint the sort to be broke in, and if Mrs. Freeman thinks she'll do it, she's fine and mistook. The pore dear is that spirited she'd die afore she'd own herself wrong. Do you think, Miss Collingwood, as she'd touch a morsel of her dinner? No, that she wouldn't! Bite nor sup wouldn't pass her lips, although I tempted her with a lamb chop and them beautiful marrow peas, and asparagus and whipped cream and cherry tart. You can judge for yourself, miss, that a healthy young lady with a good, fine appetite must be bad when she refuses food of that sort!"

"I'm very sorry, Marshall," said Dorothy, "but Miss O'Hara has really been very naughty. You have heard, of course, of the carriage accident, and how nearly Miss Percival was hurt. It's kind of you to plead for Miss O'Hara, but she really does deserve rather severe punishment, and Mrs. Freeman is most kind, as well as just. I don't really see how I can interfere."

"Are you coming, Dorothy?" called Janet May from the end of the passage.

"Yes, in one minute, Janet! I don't know what I'm to do, Marshall," continued Dorothy. "I should not venture to speak to Mrs. Freeman on the subject; she would be very, very angry."

"I don't mean that, miss; I mean that perhaps you'd talk to Miss Bridget, and persuade her to do whatever Mrs. Freeman says is right. I don't know what that is, of course, but you has a very kind way, Miss Dorothy,

and ef you would speak to Miss O'Hara, maybe she'd listen to you."

"Well, Marshall, I'll see what I can do. I must join Miss May now, for we have something important to decide, but I won't forget your words."

Marshall had to be comforted with this rather dubious speech, and Dorothy ran on to join Janet.

"Well," said Janet, "what did that impertinent servant want? I hope you showed her her place, Dorothy? The idea of her presuming to stop us when we were so busy!"

"She's not at all impertinent," said Dorothy. "After all, Janet, servants are flesh and blood, like the rest of us, and this poor Marshall, although she's not the wisest of the wise, is a good-natured creature. What do you think she wanted?"

"How can I possibly guess?"

"She was interceding for Bridget," said Dorothy.

"Bridget O'Hara!" exclaimed Janet, "that incorrigible, unpleasant girl? Why *did* you waste your time listening to her?"

"I could not help myself," replied Dorothy. "You know, of course, Janet, what Bridget did last night?"

"Yes, yes, I know," replied Janet, with a sneer; "she did something which shook the nerves of our beloved favorite. Had anyone else given Miss Percival her little fright, I could have forgiven her!"

"Janet, I wish you would not speak in that bitter way."

"I can't help it, my dear; I'm honest, whatever I am."

"But why will you dislike our dear Evelyn?"

"We won't discuss the whys nor the wherefores; the fact remains that I do dislike her."

"And you also dislike poor Bridget? I can't imagine why you take such strong prejudices."

"As to disliking Miss O'Hara, it's more a case of despising; she's beneath my dislike."

"Well, she's in trouble now," said Dorothy, with a sigh. "I think you are very much mistaken in her, Janet; she's a very original, clever, amusing girl. I find her tiresome at times, and I admit that she's dreadfully naughty, but it's the sort of naughtiness which comes from simply not knowing. The accident last night might have been a dreadful one, and Bridget certainly deserves the punishment she has got; all the same, I'm very sorry for her."

"I can't share your sorrow," replied Janet. "If her punishment, whatever it is, deprives us of her charming society for a few days, it will be a boon to the entire school. I noticed that she was absent from dinner, and I will own I have not had a pleasanter meal for some time."

"Well, Marshall is unhappy about her," replied Dorothy. "She said that Bridget would not touch her dinner. I don't exactly know what Mrs. Freeman means to do about her, but the poor girl is a prisoner in Miss Patience's dull little sitting room for the present."

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Long may she stay there! Now, do let us drop this tiresome subject. We have only ten minutes to ourselves before the rest of the committee arrive, and that point with regard to Evelyn Percival must be arranged. Come, Dorothy, let us race each other to the Lookout!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHO IS TO PROVIDE THE NEEDFUL?

FAST as they ran, however, the two girls were not the first at the place of rendezvous. Olive and Ruth, and another girl of the name of Frances Murray, were all waiting for them when they arrived.

These three girls, with Janet and Dorothy, were the members of the committee who were managing all the affairs of the Fancy Fair.

The subject now to be brought under discussion was whether Evelyn Percival, the head girl of the school, should be asked to join the committee.

Janet was very much opposed to the idea; the other girls, for more reasons than one, were in favor of it.

Evelyn was popular; she had a very clear head, she had a good many original, as well as sensible ideas; last, but not least, she was rich. If Evelyn took up the idea of the Fancy Fair with enthusiasm, the scheme would certainly succeed, for she would spare neither time nor money on the cause. She would, however, also, in the natural sequence of things, become immediately the guiding spirit of the scheme.

Janet was head at present; Janet first thought of the Fancy Fair. A little boy in the neighborhood had lost his father and mother; the father had been drowned at sea, the mother had died of the shock—the baby-

boy of a year old had been left without either friends or providers.

When out walking one day, Janet and one of her companions met the child, who was a beautiful boy, with picturesque hair and one of those fair, sweet faces which appeal straight to the hearts of all women. A little barefoot and slip-shod girl was carrying the child. Janet and her companion stopped to speak to him; his sad story was told by his eager little nurse. The girls were full of sympathy; even Janet May's languid interest was aroused. She was poor, but she took half a crown out of her purse and gave it to the beautiful baby; her companion immediately followed suit. Janet and her friend talked of the boy all the way home, and that evening the Fancy Fair was first mooted as a means of raising a substantial sum of money for little Tim's benefit.

Mrs. Freeman was only too pleased to see the rather cold-hearted Janet May roused to take an interest in another. She gave her sanction to the girls' ideas, and the Fancy Fair was now the principal object of conversation in the school. The girls liked to think they were working for little Tim, and Janet secured more affectionate glances and more pleasant words than she had ever received before in the school. She enjoyed herself greatly. Ambition was her strongest point, and that side of her character was being abundantly gratified. She was looked up to, consulted, praised; she was the head of the committee. Janet liked to be first; she was first now, with a vengeance. No fear of anyone else even trying to claim this envied position. Janet was clever; she had a good head for business; she was first; the glory of the scheme was hers; the

praise, if it succeeded, would be hers. It was all delightful, and nothing came to dim her ardor until the news reached her that Evelyn Percival had recovered and was returning to the school.

This news was most unwelcome to Janet. Everybody loved Evelyn; she was the head girl. If she joined the committee she would be expected to take the lead; Janet would be no longer first. If such a catastrophe occurred, Janet felt that the Fancy Fair would immediately lose all interest in her eyes. Her object of objects now was, whether by foul means or fair, to keep Evelyn Percival from being asked to join the committee.

She knew that her task would be a delicate one, as it would be impossible for her to give the real reasons for her strong objection to Evelyn being on the committee.

"Well, girls, here you are!" sang out Frances Murray, as the two, panting and breathless, ran up the winding stairs of the little tower. "We thought you weren't coming; but three make a quorum, and we were about to transact the business ourselves; weren't we, Ruth?"

"Yes," said Ruth, in her prim, somewhat matter-of-fact voice; "but," she added, glancing at Janet, "we are only too delighted that you have come, Janey, for what really important step can be taken with regard to the fair without your advice?"

"Of course," echoed Olive; "it is dear old Janey's idea from first to last. Sit here, Janet, love; won't you, next me? It is very hot up here, but there's nice shade under my big umbrella."

Janet took very little notice of her satellites Ruth and Olive. They were useful to her, of course, but in

her heart of hearts she rather despised them. She was by no means sure of their being faithful to her in case anything occurred to make it more for their own interest to go over to the other side.

"Sit down, sit down, and let us begin!" said Frances, who was a very downright, honest sort of girl. "What I want to do is to get to business. The fair is only three weeks off. We have committed ourselves to it, and we have really made very little way. The idea of the fair is, of course, Janet's, and she's the head for the present; but when Evelyn joins us, we'll have a lot of fresh force put into everything. Mrs. Freeman says that Evelyn is better, and that she will be down to supper this evening, and I vote that we tell her about the fair then, and ask her at once to come on the committee. What do you say, Dolly?"

"I agree, of course," said Dorothy. "Evelyn is delightful; and she has such a lot of tact and sense that having her with us will insure the success of the fair."

"Well, that is our principal business to-day," continued Frances. "We can soon put it to the vote, and then each member of the committee can join her own working party, and get things as forward as possible. For my part, I can't get the girls to do much needlework this hot weather. I have done everything in my power to incite them; little Tim's destitute condition has been aired before their eyes so often that it begins to lose its effect. The girls who are well off say they will buy things, or write to their several homes for them, and the girls who are badly off simply loll about and do nothing."

"You have not sufficient influence, Frances," said Janet, some angry spots coming into her cool, pale

cheeks. "Now, my girls work extraordinarily well. Annie and Violet, and Rosy and Mamie, are painting some beautiful fans; they will be really artistic, and will fetch a good price. All that is wanted is to get a girl to take up the work she is really interested in. She'll do it fast enough then. You can't expect anyone to care to hem stupid pinafores, and to make babies' frocks this weather."

Frances colored; she had no love for Janet, whose ideas on every point were opposed to her own.

"It's all very well to sneer at my pinafores and babies' frocks," she exclaimed; "but when people go to bazaars they like to buy useful articles. Your ideas are all very well, but you carry your art mania too far; however, when Evelyn is with us she'll make everything smooth. How glad I am that she has come back in time! Now then, who'll vote to have her asked to join the committee?"

"I will, of course," said Dorothy Collingwood. Janet was silent; she walked across the little platform at the top of the Lookout, and leant over the low parapet. Ruth and Olive were also silent; they cast anxious and undecided glances at their friend's back. They knew by her attitude that she was waiting for them to speak. In her heart Ruth adored Evelyn, but she was more or less in Janet's power, who had helped her many times with her more difficult lessons. Olive also felt that up to the present it would be her best policy to side with Janet.

"Well, Ruth, you, of course, wish us to ask Evelyn to join," said Frances, fixing her bright eyes on the girl.

"I—I don't know," said Ruth, in a hesitating voice.

"It might rather upset arrangements now," faltered Olive.

"Yes, I agree," said Janet, flashing round; "I agree with Ruth and Olive."

"Ruth doesn't know her own mind, so you can't agree with her," interrupted Frances.

"Yes, Ruth does know her own mind," said Janet; "she's a little bit timid, I grant, but she knows it well enough. You don't want Evelyn to be asked to join us, do you, Ruthy?"

"No," said Ruth, with sudden boldness, "no, I don't."

"Well, then, the votes are against you, Frances," said Janet; "so the matter is settled; three against two. I suppose we needn't waste any more time now; we can all go away and set to work."

"No; wait a minute," said Dorothy. "The decision you have come to, Janet—of course, Olive and Ruth always go with you; you know that, so they scarcely count—the decision you have come to seems to us most extraordinary. You offer a direct slight to Evelyn Percival; you leave her out in the cold. I do not see that there is anything for it, but for Frances and me to send in our resignations, if Evelyn is not to join us."

"I have very good reasons for what I am doing," said Janet. "When I stayed with my aunt, Mrs. Greville, last summer, she had a Fancy Fair very much on the lines on which I propose to conduct ours. At the last moment a lady of influence in the neighborhood was asked to join. She was very nice and very important, just as Evelyn is very nice and very important, and the people said just what you say now, that they could not possibly do without her, and that it would be a great slight not to have her. Well, she was asked at the

eleventh hour to come on the committee, and from that moment everyone else's arrangements were turned topsy-turvy, and the fair was an absolute failure. Had Evelyn been here at the beginning, we could not have helped asking her to join, but I know that it's a mistake now. I don't think I'm unreasonable in saying this."

Janet had great control of her emotions, and her words, now uttered very calmly and quietly, had a certain effect upon Frances Murray.

"There's something in what you say," she remarked after a pause. "Of course, Evelyn might be told that matters are too advanced now for her to take any active part, but there is another matter, Janet, which you have overlooked. It is this: There is not a single rich person on our committee. I am as poor as a church mouse, and am not ashamed to own it. I don't suppose you are overburdened with pelf, and I know that Dolly and Ruth and Olive are not oppressed with the weight of their purses. Now, Evelyn is rich. If Evelyn took an interest in this bazaar, she would think nothing of spending five or six pounds in buying all sorts of pretty things; she would send to London and have some big packets sent down full of those sorts of little fresh tempting *souvenirs* which people always take a fancy to at bazaars and always buy."

While Frances was speaking, Janet turned rather pale. She had foreseen this great difficulty, and was much puzzled to know how to get over it.

"The fact is," said Dolly, "there are only two really rich girls in the school. Evelyn is one, and that poor wild little Biddy is the other."

"Is Bridget O'Hara rich?" asked Janet suddenly.

"Rich? I should think so. Mrs. Freeman told me

one day that the poor child is an heiress, and will have more money than she knows what to do with."

"Why do you talk of an heiress as 'a poor child,' Dorothy?" said Janet. "That kind of speech sounds so affected and out of date."

"Well, you needn't be cross to me," said Dorothy. "I do pity Bridget very much; she will have a lot of responsibility by and by, and up to the present she certainly has no wise ideas with regard to her future."

"Poor dear," said Janet, with a little sneer, "her position is truly afflicting."

"Well, well, do let us return to business," said Frances. "Is Evelyn to be asked to join or not. We all know that Janet doesn't love her; we can't make out why, but we are not going to trouble ourselves on that score. I repeat that it is a slight to Evelyn not to ask her to join, but that fact may be glossed over by making a great deal of the fact that she was not here at the beginning. We might support you, Janet, in this, in order that you might retain your dearly coveted position as head of the fair."

"I don't care a bit about that," said Janet, coloring high.

"Now, my dear; now, my dear, don't let that graceful little tongue lend itself to a wicked story. However, to return to business. If we exclude Evelyn from taking an active part in the arrangements of the fair, who is to provide the needful? Now, Janet May, there's a puzzler for you; answer it if you can."

Janet walked over to the little parapet, and, leaning against it, looked out over the dazzling, dancing summer sea. She was silent for a full moment, then she turned slowly and looked at her companions.

"I own that the money is a sore puzzle," she said. "It goes without saying that we must have money. Give me twenty-four hours, girls, to think what is best to be done. If, at the end of that time, I have thought of no expedient, I will own myself defeated, and will withdraw my opposition to Evelyn Percival being asked to join."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "JANET MAY STALL."

THE several girls of the committee separated, and went to join the different parties who were working for the Fancy Fair.

Almost every girl in the school had volunteered to do something, and on this long, lovely half-holiday they had decided to take their work out to different parts of the grounds, where they sat, some under the shelter of the wide-spreading beech trees, others in the summerhouses, or tents, which were scattered here and there in the grounds.

Ruth, who had a certain gift for management, was helping three or four of the smaller girls to make some patchwork quilts, but Olive had decided to keep with Janet and help her as much as possible.

Janet's party had assembled in a large, roomy summerhouse. There was a rustic table in the middle, and rustic chairs and benches surrounded it. Here six girls, all of whom belonged to the lower school, were sitting round a table laughing and chatting merrily. Some bits of colored silk, some gay chintzes, a heap of wools for crewel work, several boxes of water-color paints, some pieces of cardboard, some fans, screens, and pretty baskets were scattered about.

The girls were waiting for Janet and Ruth. They were not disposed to work. They lolled about and

laughed, and looked somewhat wistfully at the lovely outer world, with the flickering shadows on the grass, and the dancing, happy sunshine making itself felt through everything.

"Even a Fancy Fair is a bore," said pretty little Violet to her crony Nora.

"But then we are doing it for Tim," said Alice, raising her charming, sweet face, and blushing as she spoke.

"Yes," retorted Violet again; "I think of Tim all the time, and how nice it will be to collect money for the little darling, and how happy we'll be in the long vacation, when we remember how we saved the pet from going to the workhouse, but still I do want to bathe awfully to-day, and however hard I think of the good this Fancy Fair is going to do, I cannot help being lazy this hot weather."

"Did you know, girls," exclaimed Nora, "that Bridget can swim and dive? She made a bet yesterday in the school that if we dropped sixpence into the sea she'd bring it up again in her mouth. She did really; she was most positive about it. Mary Hill and Cissy Jones bet against her that she wouldn't, but she was so fierce, and said she had done it fifty times before in the lake at home. I do love Bridget, don't you, Violet?"

"Yes, I adore her," said Violet, "she's quite the jolliest girl I ever came across. I'm awfully sorry she has got into trouble, and I hope Mrs. Freeman will soon forgive her. Poor dear, she doesn't mean to do wrong, and she *is* such fun."

"She's like a big baby," said Alice; "but all the same, it is wrong of her to bet, isn't it?"

"I don't know," replied Violet; "the way Biddy does

things makes them appear not a bit wrong. I should like awfully to see her bring up that sixpence in her mouth. But hush, let us pretend to be talking of something else, for here comes Janet and that nasty Olive."

"Janet is really very nice about this fair," said Alice; "but she hates Biddy, and she has always hated darling Evelyn; it is so funny!"

"O Alice, do shut up," exclaimed Violet. "Here's Janet coming in. Let's pretend to be talking of something else."

The little girls bent their heads together, pulled forward their different working materials, and looked busy and important when Janet and Olive came in.

"Well, girls," said Janet, "I hope you are making lots of progress. How about that fan, Alice? Oh, you naughty puss, you have not touched it yet to-day. Now set to work; do set to work. Violet, how is your mat getting on? Let me look at it, dear; very pretty indeed; don't you think you could finish it to-day? Molly," turning to the smallest girl in the summer-house, "you said you would paint some ribbon markers. Have you begun them yet? No, I see you haven't. Sit down now, you lazy darling, and try to make good progress."

Janet's tone was bright and confident. It had immediate effect upon the children, stimulating their listlessness, and exciting them to work with energy.

Janet herself sat near the entrance of the summer-house. She had an easel in front of her, and was painting an exquisite little water-color from nature. Janet had great talent for a certain kind of painting. There

was nothing bold nor masterful in her work, but her touch was true and delicate, and in a small way she could produce a very pretty effect.

The younger girls thought Janet's painting perfection, and they stole up now, one by one, to look at her work and to give enthusiastic opinions with regard to it.

Their little comments were delightful to her. She had a great thirst for praise, and could swallow it in any guise.

While she worked, however, her thoughts were very busy; she had to solve a difficult problem, and had only a few hours to do it in.

After a long period of silence a remark dropped from her lips.

"I have made up my mind," she said, turning round and addressing all the children.

"O Janey, what have you thought of now?" asked Alice, raising her pretty flushed face, and pushing aside her painting.

"Take care of messing that fan, dear; you are painting in that red poppy very nicely," answered Janet. "Well, girls, I have made up my mind."

"Yes, Janey, yes; what about?" they all answered.

"Our stall is to be far and away the most beautiful at the Fancy Fair."

"Three cheers!" exclaimed the children, but then Alice said in a wistful tone:

"I don't see how it can be, Janet, for we are none of us rich. I heard Dolly say this morning that Evelyn's stall would certainly be far and away the best, for she was the only one of us who had money."

"Evelyn may not have a stall at all," said Janet, "but, in any case, if you six little girls will back me,

and if Olive—I can answer for Olive that she will do her best—if Olive will help also, our stall will be the richest and the most lovely at the fair. Will you trust me to manage this, children?"

"Of course, Janet!" replied Nora, her eyes sparkling.

"Now I tell you what," said Janet, "I know pretty well what the other girls are doing. Frances Murray's girls are going in for the sober and useful; Dorothy Collingwood's are working with a will on the same dull lines. Poor old Ruth—oh, I'm not disparaging her—can't rise above her patchwork quilts, whereas we, we alone, have embraced ART. Girls, the combination of *art* and *money* will produce the most lovely stall at the fair. Now I have spoken! You stick to me, girls, and keep your secret to yourselves. Say nothing, but determine, every one of you, to do her utmost, not only for little Tim, but for the glory of the 'Janet May Stall.'"

"We will, we will!" said the children.

They were quite impressed by Janet's enthusiasm, and looked upon their own humble little efforts in the great field of art with some awe.

"It shall be done!" said Janet. "You have my word for it; I can, I will manage it. I shall take immediate steps. Olive, will you look after the girls during the remainder of this afternoon? I must do something at once to secure our ends."

Janet walked quickly back to the house. She was so lost in thought that she never saw a girl who was running full tilt against her.

"A penny for your thoughts, Janey!" exclaimed Dorothy Collingwood. "I never saw your brow so knit with care, my love. What *can* be the matter? Is

the problem you have got to solve within twenty-four hours so intensely difficult?"

"It is difficult, Dorothy," replied Janet. "But, puzzling as it is, I am not going to allow it to conquer me. By the way, that reminds me; have you just come from the prisoner?"

"What prisoner?"

"That sweet Irish maid, Bridget O'Hara."

"No, I haven't, Janet; I have not forgotten her by any means. But I suppose I ought to ask Mrs. Freeman's leave before I visit her."

"Well, can't you ask it?"

"I have been looking all over the place for her, but can't find her anywhere. I am ever so sorry, for I should like to see Biddy, and I am sure I could exercise a little influence over her. However, there is nothing to be done until I get Mrs. Freeman's permission, and, as I'm going up to Evelyn now, poor Biddy must ponder over her shortcomings for at least another hour."

"What a happy girl you are, Dorothy!" said Janet. "Just fancy spending all one's time between the good and the naughty favorite of the school. Oh, what will not money effect!"

"I did not know before that poor Biddy was the favorite of the school," said Dorothy. "I wish you would not speak in such a satirical way, Janet. What *is* the good of trying to throw scorn on Evelyn? People only dislike you when you speak like that, and I earnestly wish you wouldn't."

"You are a good little soul, Dolly," said Janet, "but I must speak as the spirit moves me. Now don't let me keep you from your darling. There! I'll try and tolerate her for your sake."

Dorothy ran off, and Janet walked slowly past the front of the house, her brow knit in anxious thought.

She had reached a little wicket gate, which led round to the back premises, when she was suddenly startled by finding herself face to face with Mrs. Freeman.

For a moment a flood of color rushed to her cheeks. She felt inclined to pass her mistress with a brief salutation; then another impulse arrested her steps.

"Mrs. Freeman," she said, "may I speak to you for a moment?"

"Certainly, my dear! Can I do anything for you?"

"I should like to ask a favor of you."

"Well, Janet, you don't very often petition for my small mercies. You are a good girl, studious and attentive. Your masters and mistresses always give me pleasant reports of your progress. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I've been told that Bridget O'Hara is under punishment. I should very much like to see her."

This request of Janet's evidently astonished Mrs. Freeman. She looked attentively at her pupil, then said in a voice of surprise:

"I did not even know that you were friends."

"Nor are we. I think without any doubt we are at the antipodes in everything. But—I am sorry for a girl who is under punishment. I thought perhaps I might say something to her about—submitting. She might take it better from one of her schoolfellows than from a mistress. This occurred to me, but perhaps I am only taking a liberty."

"By no means, Janet. I frankly say I am pleased and surprised at your thoughtfulness. I confess to

you, my dear, that Bridget is a very difficult girl to manage."

"I am sure of that!"

"Very, very difficult. The care of her weighs heavily on me. I sympathize with her in some things. She is full of good impulses, but her character—well, it has not been trained at all. Are you likely to be able to influence her, Janet?"

"I could but do my best!"

Mrs. Freeman paused to consider.

"Had Dorothy made this petition," she said then, "I should have granted it, as a matter of course. Dorothy has always tried to be nice to Bridget, and it would have been like her to do a kindness now. Dorothy, however, has come to me with no such request, and you have, Janet. I am pleased with your thoughtfulness. I shall certainly not refuse you. Go to her, dear, and say what is in your heart. You have my best wishes!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Freeman," said Janet, in her low, pretty voice. She tripped away, and a moment later was knocking at Miss Patience's sitting-room door.

"Come in, whoever you are!" said a sulky voice from the interior of the room.

Janet opened the door, shut it carefully behind her, and advanced to the table, on the edge of which Bridget had perched herself as if she were on horseback.

"Well, what do you want now that you have come?" asked Miss O'Hara, in her proudest voice. "You never liked me, so I suppose you are awfully pleased to see me like this?"

"Now do hush," said Janet. "I have not come in an

unkind spirit. You must really listen, Bridget, to what I have come to say. I am the very first of your schoolfellows to visit you, and *would* I trouble to come if I did not mean it kindly?"

Janet's voice was the essence of gentle calm. It affected poor tempest-tossed Biddy, who jumped down from her imaginary horse, and leant up against the window-sill, a strikingly handsome, but defiant looking young sinner.

"I suppose you do mean it kindly," she said, "and you are the first of the girls to look me up. But you are sure Mrs. Freeman did not send you?"

"She knows that I have come, but she certainly did not send me."

"Well, I suppose it's good-natured of you. I thought Dolly Collingwood would have come to me before now, but it's 'out of sight, out of mind' with her as with the rest of them."

"Dorothy, at the present moment, is with Evelyn Percival."

"The girl who was thrown out of the carriage last night—the queen of the school? I may be thankful she was not badly hurt, poor dear."

Janet did not say anything. Bridget turned to the window, and began to beat a tattoo on the pane with her knuckles.

"Look here," she said again, after a pause, "now that you are here, what do you want? It's good-natured of you to come, of course, but I can't make out what good you are likely to do."

"Yes. I shall do plenty of good," said Janet, in her assured tones. "I am going to give you some advice which you will be very glad to take."

"Indeed, then, you are finely mistaken. I'll be nothing of the kind."

"You've not heard what I'm going to say, yet. Won't you sit down and let us be comfortable?"

"You can sit if you fancy it. I prefer standing."

"Very well; we shall both be pleased. This is a very comfortable chair."

Janet sank back in it, and raised her placid face to Bridget's. The two girls were in all particulars contrasts. Biddy's curls were now a mop; a wild, aggressive, almost disreputable looking mop. Her white dress was draggled and crumpled, her cheeks were deeply flushed, her eyes flashed ominous fire, her proud lips took many haughty and defiant curves. Janet, in contradistinction to all this, was the soul of neat commonplace. Her pale blue cambric frock fitted her neat figure like a glove. She had white linen cuffs at her wrists; her little hands were exquisitely clean; her fair face looked the essence of peace. Her neat, smooth head of light hair shone like satin.

"I am anxious about you," said Janet. "I can see quite plainly that you are going all wrong."

Bridget gave a sort of snort.

Janet held up her small hand imploringly.

"Do listen," she said. "How can I explain myself if you interrupt me each moment?"

"But you never liked me, Janey. You have shown that all too plainly. I cannot imagine what you are prying into my affairs for. Now if Dolly came——"

"Dolly has not come, and I have. Now, will you listen. I will frankly say that I did not care about you when you first came to the school. When I saw you so—so defiant, Bridget, so proud, so free, so absolutely

fearless; when I saw you with all these characteristics, taking people by storm, for you know you did take the little girls of the school quite by storm, I felt a sense of strong irritation against you. I never met a girl like you before; you puzzled me; you did not please me. Now, I am going to be quite frank; I do not really like you much better now, but as I see that you fully intend to be on my side, it is impossible for me any longer not to take your part."

"I fully intend to be on your side?" repeated Bridget. "Indeed, then, I don't, and I may as well say so frankly at once."

"Yes, Bridget, you do; you can't help yourself, for you and I will in future have good cause to hate the same girl."

"What girl?'

"Evelyn Percival; the one you have just spoken of as the queen of the school."

"The darling!" exclaimed Bridget, "and why in the name of goodness am I to hate her?"

"Well, you must be a poor-spirited thing if you don't. May I ask if you would have got into your present scrape but for her? Have you not before this disobeyed Mrs. Freeman? Up to last night she took pity on you; she said to herself: 'Bridget knows nothing of the rules of the school; Bridget has never been accustomed to obey any rules, I will be merciful to her, I will be lenient, I will never forget that Biddy has been queen in her Irish home.'"

"Oh, don't talk to me about my home," said Bridget, her lips quivering, her eyes filling with tears.

"Yes; but is it not true, Bridget? Has not Mrs. Freeman been very lenient to you in the past?"

"I suppose she has. I never thought much about it. I scraped along somehow; I was happy enough."

"Well, was she lenient to you to-day?"

"Need you ask, Janet? I'm a prisoner; a close prisoner in this abominable room. Such treatment will soon kill me. I can't eat; I shall soon die of misery."

"It is hard on you, Bridget; you are exactly like a wild bird of the woods put into a cage."

"Yes, that's it; and the captive bird will break its heart."

"Poor Bridget! I didn't like you in your free days, but I'm willing to own that I pity you now."

"Thank you, thank you; but I hate pity. Whoever would think of offering pity to Bridget O'Hara at home?"

"But Bridget O'Hara is no longer at home; she is a captive in a strange land. Don't cry, Biddy. Let us leave sentimentalities now, and come to facts. Whom do you think you owe this severe treatment to?"

"I am sure I can't tell you."

"I can tell you, however. You owe it entirely—entirely to Evelyn Percival."

"Now what do you mean? that nice girl whom I nearly killed?"

"You didn't nearly kill her; that's all stuff! Bridget, you don't know Evelyn Percival, but I do. Had any other girl been in the carriage when you and the children startled the horses, you would have been forgiven. Mrs. Freeman would still have remembered that you were unaccustomed to rules, and she would have tried to break you in gently and considerately; but as Evelyn happened to be the person whose delicate nerves sustained a shock, Mrs. Freeman was incapable of

showing any mercy. Evelyn Percival poses in the school as a sort of saint. Nearly everyone bows down to her; Mrs. Freeman, head mistress though she is, is so influenced by her that you are sure to have a bad time in future."

"I shan't stand it; it isn't likely."

"You will be forced to stand it. If Evelyn gives the smallest suggestion about you, it will be certain to be followed out. I pity you, Bridget, but you are certainly likely to have a lively time."

"You don't mean to tell me," answered Bridget, "that I have to thank Miss Percival for this punishment; that it is at her instigation I am here?"

"You are certainly here at no one else's instigation."

"Did she tell Mrs. Freeman to make a close prisoner of me, and to starve me?"

"It is your own fault if you are starved, Bridget; don't exaggerate, my dear; you do no good by that. As to your being made a prisoner, you certainly owe it to Evelyn. She can say things, even though she does not put them into words."

"Oh, I understand," said Bridget. She turned again to look out of the window, and her impatient fingers once more played a tattoo on the glass.

"Evelyn is most popular," continued Janet, "for the simple reason that people don't read her through and through. I can see beneath that sweet, saintly calm, and I honestly say that I cannot bear her. Now, Bridget, if you will come on my side, if you will join me in opposing the pernicious influence that girl exercises, I can help you out of this scrape without allowing you to humiliate yourself, and I can at the same

time put you up to having the nicest little revenge in the world on this delightful Miss Percival."

"But Dorothy believes in her, and Dorothy is so sweet and kind," exclaimed Bridget, in perplexity.

"Poor, dear Dolly," exclaimed Janet, "anyone can take her in; but you, my dear, although you are not very learned, are clever. However, this is your own concern. If you like to stay in this hot room until Mrs. Freeman breaks in your proud spirit, and if you like to submit to the many indignities which I can plainly see are before you, that, of course, is your affair. I thought it only kind to warn you, but perhaps I have interfered unwarrantably. If so, forgive me."

Janet rose as she spoke, and took a step or two toward the door.

"No, don't go," exclaimed Biddy. "You puzzle me very much; there's no one in the world who hates mean ways more than I do, and if Evelyn is that sort——"

"She is that sort, Bridget."

"Well, well!" Bridget turned again to the window.

"What am I to do, Janet?" she said, after a pause. Her tone was quite humble; there was a crushed expression in her face.

"Poor old thing!" said Janet, in her light, silvery voice. She went up to Bridget, and gave her a careless kiss on her cheek. She could afford to do this, for she knew the victory was hers.

"In the future I will be your friend," she said; "you may rely upon me. We are going to choose fresh chums in a week's time. Suppose we choose one another. I know we are not a bit alike, but that's just the very thing; opposites should keep together. However, there's time enough to settle that presently."

"Yes, quite time enough," said Bridget. "I thought that I'd take Dolly for my chum."

"You can't get her, my dear; she's bespoken to Evelyn long ago."

"That horrid Evelyn!" Bridget stamped her foot impatiently.

"Ah, I see, Biddy, that you and I will get on capitally. I could kiss you again, but kissing isn't my way. Now then to business. The first thing is to get you out of this room."

"How is that to be effected? Mrs. Freeman says that I am to stay here until I promise to obey the rules of the school. I can't obey them, so I suppose I'm to stay here until I die."

"And why can't you obey them, Bridget?"

"Why can't I obey the rules of the school? We are not likely to be chums if you talk to me in that fashion, Janet."

"Now, my dear, I must just reason with you a little. You say you can't obey the rules of the school; you say so because you fail to understand them. If you put yourself under my guidance, and I am quite willing to take charge of you, I will show you that you can obey them sufficiently to keep yourself out of all serious scrapes, and yet at the same time you will enjoy as much liberty as any girl need desire. Do you think I am unhappy on account of the rules of the school?"

"No; but you haven't got a wild heart like me."

"Poor Biddy, I'll take care of your wild heart. It was ill-natured of me not to see after you before, but in the future, my dear, you are quite safe. I am going to fetch Mrs. Freeman now."

"What in the world for?"

"To tell her that you will obey the rules, that you will cease to be an unruly member of the community, that you are going to be my chum."

"O Janet, but it's dreadful to promise and not to perform. I have been awfully naughty, I know, over and over and over again, but I have never stooped to breaking a promise."

"You shall not break this promise, for I won't let you, but I can show you a way to keep the fetters from galling. Now I am going to fetch Mrs. Freeman. It's worth your while to submit at once, Biddy, for I intend to take you for a row."

"A row on the water!" Bridget's eyes sparkled; she threw back her shoulders with a gesture of relief.

"Yes," repeated Janet, "a row on the water. The school boat is at our disposal this evening. Mademoiselle is coming to take charge of us, but, as she is really nobody, we shall practically be as free as air. Stay where you are, Biddy, until I fetch Mrs. Freeman."

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING SIDES.

WHEN Dorothy entered Evelyn's bedroom she found her friend up and dressed.

"I'm quite well, really, Dolly," said Evelyn, with a smile. "I stayed in bed until I could endure it no longer. I can't tell you how vexed I am that I fainted last night, and gave Mrs. Freeman a fright. There was nothing really to make anyone else faint, for that brave girl saved me from being hurt in the most wonderful manner. By the way, how is she? I should like to see her and to thank her."

"Poor Eva," said Dorothy, coming up and kissing her friend, "you are just the most forgiving creature in existence. Anyone else would be awfully angry with Bridget. Her conduct very nearly cost you your life!"

"There is a wide difference between 'very nearly' and 'quite,'" said Evelyn, with a smile. "I escaped with a 'very nearly,' and feel as well as ever now, and rather ashamed of myself. There never was a girl who meant less harm than this Bridget. I can see her now running down the road, her face all smiles, her eyes dancing, her white teeth showing; I can see the little ones surrounding her. They waved boughs of trees, and they shouted and sang as they came. For one moment I said to myself, 'O Jubilate! here is a welcome worth having!' but then Caspar took fright, the carriage

swayed horribly, the cushions jumped up as if they were going to strike me, and I remembered nothing more until I awoke with my head on this girl's lap, and Mrs. Freeman bending over me. I should like to see the girl, to thank her. Where is she, Dolly? I am attracted by her face; it is a very lovely one!"

"Well, sit down, now, by the window, and let us talk," answered Dorothy. "I shall be jealous if you give all your thoughts to Bridget O'Hara. I know she's a pretty girl, and I like her very much for some things. But, oh dear, she is a care! I don't believe that any school had ever before such a madcap in it. But don't let us waste all our time talking about her. You can't help hearing her name spoken morning, noon, and night, when you come into the school."

Evelyn sank down in a low easy-chair by the open window. She wore a white cambric dress, and a pale blue belt round her slender waist. Her gentle eyes, also faint blue in their coloring, looked out over the summer scene. She was not beautiful, but there was a charm about her, a sense of repose, which made it delightful to be with her. The singular unselfishness of her nature was apparent in everything she did, said, and thought.

"I'm delighted to be back, Dolly," she said. "This illness of mine has been such a bother, and it's delicious to be well and able to go in for things again. Now, if I may not speak of Bridget, tell me about the other girls in the school. Tell me, also, what is the great object of interest at present?"

"Oh, the Fancy Fair!" Dorothy colored as she spoke. "You need not bother your head about it, Evelyn," she continued quickly. "Janet is at the head

of it; it was she who thought of the fair, and she's the moving spring. You know what that means, don't you, darling?"

"I'm afraid I do," replied Evelyn. "Does Janet May dislike me as much as ever?"

"She certainly does; but don't fret about her; she's not worth it. Eva, you will most likely be asked to come on the committee, and to take a stall at the Fancy Fair. If you get the invitation, will you accept it?"

"Of course I shall. Need you ask? Alack and alas! I have no chance of winning any prizes, so the fair will be a great diversion. I suppose it's a charity concern; who is it for?"

"A little orphan boy in the neighborhood. Oh, you'll learn all about him presently. We are working as hard as possible for the fair. If you come on the committee, Evelyn, you must let me help you with your stall."

"*If* I come on the committee," repeated Evelyn. "I suppose I am quite certain to be asked to join? Dolly, you look at me in rather a queer way!"

"*Do* I? Don't notice my looks. There is something worrying me, but nothing bad may come of it. It is so nice to talk to you again. Now I have something to say about that poor Biddy. At the present moment she is in disgrace."

"In disgrace? What about?"

"I'm afraid it's about you."

"Oh, but I must speak to Mrs. Freeman. She really meant nothing wrong, dear child."

"She broke the rules in leaving the grounds without leave. I think it is for her disobedience that Mrs. Freeman is punishing her. She has shut her up in

Miss Patience's room, and poor Biddy won't eat, and is in a dreadful state of mind. Marshall spoke to me about her after dinner, and asked me to go to her; but we had a committee meeting just then, and afterward I could not find Mrs. Freeman."

"Have you left the poor girl by herself all this time, Dolly?"

"I must own that I have. I will go and have a talk with her as soon as ever I leave you; not that I can do much good, she's such a queer kind of mixture of obstinacy and passion."

"But it does seem dreadful to leave her by herself all this time; just as if no one had a scrap of sympathy for her. Let us both go to her at once, Dolly. I want to thank her for being so brave."

"But Mrs. Freeman; we ought to ask her leave."

"Mrs. Freeman will be in her own sitting room at this time. Come along, Dolly, we have just a few minutes to spare before the gong sounds for tea."

Dorothy made no further objections, and she and Eva went downstairs side by side.

They knocked at Mrs. Freeman's sitting-room door. She was not in, but Miss Delicia was tidying books and papers on her davenport.

"Is that you, Eva!" she exclaimed in delight. "Why, you look as well and jolly as possible. How nice to have you back again!"

The little lady ran up to Evelyn, and kissed her affectionately. "Now, my darling, you are not going to tire yourself," she said. "Come and sit here by the open window."

"I have been sitting still and lying down all day," replied Evelyn, with a faint little grimace; "I am not

really tired at all. Dolly and I came, Miss Delicia, to ask Mrs. Freeman to give us leave to go and see that poor girl, Bridget O'Hara. It seems she has got into a scrape on my account."

"And rightly, my dear; and very rightly. For my part, I don't approve of punishments; I am all the other way; but such conduct as Bridget's does deserve a sharp reprimand. Suppose you had been seriously hurt, Evelyn?"

"But I was not hurt at all. I wish I could go and see Miss O'Hara now; I want to thank her for having saved my life. If she did give me a fright, Miss Delicia, she also kept me from the consequences of her own act. I wish I could thank her."

"Well, dear, do go to her; I'll give you permission, and set things right with Mrs. Freeman. If you and Dolly can bring that wild child to hear reason we shall all be only too delighted. Run away, my dears, both of you, and do your best."

The girls left the room, and ran down the stone passage which led to Miss Patience's little sitting room at the other side of the big house.

They were surprised, however, on reaching it, to find the door flung wide open and the room empty.

Dorothy gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Bridget must have given in," she said; "Mrs. Freeman must have come to her, and she must have yielded. Oh, what a relief! How glad I am! Come, Evelyn, let us go on the terrace, and walk up and down until tea is ready."

The broad terrace which ran in front of the house was completely sheltered from the sun at this hour. There was a pleasant breeze, and the girls, as they

paced arm in arm up and down the broad path, looked happy and picturesque.

Two girls who were coming up the grassy slope at this moment stopped at sight of them; one uttered a slight exclamation of dismay, the other made an eager bound forward.

"There's Dolly!" exclaimed Bridget; "do let me run to her, Janet."

"Miss Percival is with her," exclaimed Janet. "Do you really want to speak to Miss Percival, Bridget, after all you have suffered on her account?"

"But she looks very nice."

"What a poor, weak kind of creature you are to be influenced by looks; besides, she is in reality very plain. Even her warmest admirers have never yet bestowed on her the palm of beauty."

"Oh, I like her face; it looks so good."

Janet paused in her walk to give her young companion a glance of steady contempt.

"Can I possibly go on with this scheme of mine?" she muttered to herself. "Bridget O'Hara is altogether too dreadful." Had Janet yielded to her impulses at that moment she would have told Bridget to join her beloved Dorothy and Evelyn Percival, and have declared her intention of washing her hands of her on the spot. Had Janet acted so, this story need never have been written. But that strong ambition, that thirst for praise, which was her most marked characteristic came to her aid. Bridget was the only means within her power to achieve a most desirable end, and as such she must be tolerated.

"Come down this walk with me," she said, in a low tone; "come quickly, before those girls see us. I want

to say a word to you." She took Biddy's hand as she spoke and hurried her into a little sheltered path which led round to the back of the house.

"Now, Bridget," she said, "I must clearly understand how matters are going to be. Dorothy Collingwood cares nothing at all for you; she is a most fickle girl. She took you up to a certain extent when first you came, but her conduct during your punishment proves how little she really cares for you. She and Evelyn will be all in all to each other, and if you go back to them, you will soon see for yourself that three is trumpery; now, on the other hand, if you will be guided by me, I will keep my promise to you. I am willing to become your chum, and if I am your chum, I will see you safely past all the rocks ahead. You know nothing whatever about school. There are two sorts of girls at every school; there is the girl who is always in trouble, who doesn't learn her lessons, who doesn't obey the rules. Such a girl is a misery both to herself and her companions. There is also the girl who obeys the rules, and who learns her lessons. I represent the one sort of girl, you represent the other. I can teach you to become like me, without making things at all unpleasant to you, but you must choose at once; you must be on my side, or on Evelyn Percival's side. Now which is it to be?"

"Yours, of course," said Bridget; "you are the only girl in the school who was kind to me to-day, so of course I'll be on your side."

"Very well, that's all right. You must copy me when you talk to Evelyn Percival. You must show Dorothy also that you resent her coldness. There's the tea gong. Let us go in. Immediately after tea

you will find time to write that letter to your father, won't you, dear?"

"Yes, of course. I know he'll give me as much money as I want."

"Ask him for plenty; there's nothing like money when all is said and done. Now come along to tea. I won't be able to sit near you, Bridget, but I'll have my eye on you, so don't forget how I'll expect you to behave."

CHAPTER X.

CHECKMATE.

THERE was great astonishment among the girls who met at the Lookout the next day when Janet pronounced in calm, decided tones that a new member was willing to join the committee, that the new member was the Irish girl, Bridget O'Hara, who would help her at her stall, and would give as much money to the cause as was necessary to insure its success.

"Bridget O'Hara is not here," said Janet, "but she has asked me to speak for her. She has written to her father to ask him to send her plenty of funds. She will be more or less of a cipher, of course, but having the wherewithal she will be a useful one. I propose, therefore," continued Janet May, "that our committee remains as it is with this one welcome addition, and that Evelyn Percival is not asked to join."

While Janet was speaking Dorothy's rosy face turned very pale. "Now I understand," she murmured; "now I can account for poor Biddy's change of manner. O Janet, why didn't you leave her alone?"

"What do you mean?" said Janet, flashing round angrily. "Bridget's help is most desirable. She has money, and she won't interfere with projects already formed. Had Miss Percival been asked to join, she would, of course, have given us plenty of money, but she would also have interfered. I may as well plainly

say that I don't choose to be interfered with at this juncture. That is plain English, I hope; you can make the worst of it, girls, all of you! I prefer that poor nonentity of a Bridget to Miss Percival, and I have managed to have my way."

"I suppose we must vote for Biddy," said Ruth and Olive.

"Of course, you must vote for her," retorted Janet.

"I do not object to her joining the committee," said Frances; "but I think you have managed the whole thing in a very underhand way, Janet. You are fond of saying that you like frank opinions, so there is mine for you."

"All right!" said Janet; "I accept it for what it is worth. Now then, girls, this weighty matter is settled. Dorothy, you must say something nice to Evelyn. Of course, you have a reasonable excuse to give her. It would be ridiculous to ask her to join us at the eleventh hour. She is a sensible girl, and will——"

At this moment, Olive, who was bending over the parapet, turned round, and said to her companions in a low, almost awestruck voice:

"Mrs. Freeman is coming up the steps of the Lookout!"

The next instant the smiling face of the head mistress appeared.

"Well, my dears," she said, "I won't waste your valuable time a single moment longer than is necessary. I am very much pleased with all your zeal in getting up this little bazaar. I, on my part, will take every possible pains to see that your Fancy Fair is well attended. I have a suggestion, however, to make; it is this: Evelyn Percival ought to be asked to take a

prominent part in the management of the fair. She has come back in sufficient time for this; her health is quite restored, and it is due to her position in the school to pay her this respect. I dare say, my loves," continued Mrs. Freeman, "that you have all thought of this already, and are even now preparing to ask her to join you. If so, you will find her in the summerhouse at the end of the East Walk with Kitty Thompson. Good-by, my dears! Forgive me if I have interfered unnecessarily."

Mrs. Freeman went away. The girls had no time to ask her a question. The head mistress was always quick and decisive in her movements. She was kind, even indulgent, but she was also firm. From Mrs. Freeman's decision each girl in the school felt there was no appeal.

As her retreating footsteps sounded on the winding stairs of the little tower, the girls who formed the committee for the Fancy Fair looked at one another. In Janet's gaze there were open-eyed consternation and dismay. Olive and Ruth appeared what they were: the very essence of uncertainty and nervousness. Frances Murray could not restrain an expression of triumph appearing in her bright eyes, while Dolly looked both glad and sorry.

"O Janet!" she said, "I wish I could take your side and my own. I wish I could obey dear Mrs. Freeman, and have our darling Evelyn to help us, and be one of us, and I also wish to do the thing that makes you happy."

"Oh, don't worry about me," said Janet. "Of course, the thing is inevitable. Under existing circumstances, I give in. I have only one request to make, girls, and

that is, that you will not betray to Evelyn Percival, who, of course, will take the lead now in the management of the Fancy Fair, the very frank objections I have made to having her with us. We must welcome her, of course, with a good grace, and I trust to you all to keep my little remarks to yourselves."

"Of course, of course, Janey," they each eagerly replied.

"As if we could be so mean as to tell," remarked Ruth, going up to her friend and giving her hand a squeeze.

Janet did not return the pressure of Ruth's hand. She turned abruptly to Dorothy.

"Evelyn is to be found in the summerhouse. Will you go and fetch her at once, Dolly?"

Dorothy ran off without another word. While she was absent Janet kept her back to her friends. She generally carried a little sketchbook in her pocket; she took it out now, and under the shelter of her parasol pretended to sketch the lovely summer landscape which surrounded her.

The other girls who were watching saw, however, that her small, dainty fingers scarcely moved.

When voices and steps were heard in the distance, Janet was the first to turn round, and when Evelyn appeared on the scene Janet went up and bade her welcome.

"We have elected you to join our committee," she said, in a low and careless voice. "As the head girl of the school, you will naturally take the lead in the matter; but, as you have been obliged to be absent when our scheme was first started, you would perhaps like me to tell you how far we have gone."

"I am delighted to join the committee," replied Evelyn, "and particularly glad that you have asked me, Janet. You may be sure, girls, I'll do all I can to help, but as the idea of the Fancy Fair was yours, Janet, I don't think I ought to take the lead."

For a second a pleased expression flitted across Janet May's cold, self-possessed face. It vanished, however, as quickly as it came.

"No," she said, "I cannot possibly take the lead. The head girl of the school has certain rights which no one must deprive her of. It is generous of you to offer me your place, Evelyn, but, even if I allowed myself to accept the position, Mrs. Freeman would instantly require me to vacate it in your favor. The thing is settled, then; you are formally invited by us all to join our committee; is that not so, girls?"

"Yes, yes," they all exclaimed, delight and relief plainly apparent on every face.

"You are formally elected, therefore," proceeded Janet. "Won't you sit down, Evelyn? That is a comfortable seat in the shade over there. Won't you take it? I can then tell you as briefly as possible what we have done."

Evelyn sat down in the comfortable seat without a word. Frances Murray sprang to her side, slipped her hand through her arm, and looked into her face with adoration; Ruth and Olive were only restrained by Janet's presence from groveling at her feet. Dolly alone leant in a careless attitude against the low parapet of the tower. Her affectionate glance traveled many times to her friend's face, but she had too much tact and too good taste to show her preference too openly while Janet May was present.

"Up to the present," said Janet, also leaning against the parapet, and exactly facing Evelyn, "up to the present I have managed the proposed bazaar. If it is generally wished, I can still remain treasurer. At the present moment, I am sorry to say, there is very little money to guard. If the thing is to be a success, more money must be spent, but that, of course, is for Evelyn to decide. We are having the bazaar, Evelyn, hoping to raise money to send little Tim Donovan to a good school. Mrs. Freeman said something about this bazaar being repeated, if necessary, in the future; but that, of course, we need not discuss at present. The bazaar is to be called a Fancy Fair. It will be held in a large tent in the four-acre field. This part of the entertainment Mrs. Freeman has herself promised to provide. Our present idea is to have four stalls. You will, of course, conduct the principal one; I, if permitted, will take the second; Dorothy or Frances Murray will manage the third; and there will also be a refreshment stall, for which we have not at present provided. Each girl of the committee has undertaken to secure a certain number of fancy materials for sale at the fair. Ruth, Olive, and I at the present time are doing well; about six little girls of the lower school are helping us. We meet twice a week in the summer-house at the end of the South Walk to work for the bazaar, and the results will, I believe, be fairly creditable. I cannot say what arrangements Frances is making, but she will doubtless tell you herself. Dorothy is also the soul of industry. You'll probably reconstruct everything, and I shall be ready to come to you for advice whenever you ask me. There is, I think, only one thing more to say, and that is, that I have

persuaded the new girl, Bridget O'Hara, to join us. She does not strictly belong either to the upper or the lower school at present. Her position in the house is, I think, somewhat unique. She is a very tall, grown-up-looking girl, but she is not yet quite fifteen years of age. Her mind very much resembles her body, being extremely grown-up in some ways, and absolutely childish in others. Her acquirements are also those of a child. I have thought it right, however, in your absence, of course, Evelyn, to ask her to join us. She has a good deal of originality; she has also some money, which she is willing to devote to the cause. I think that is all. I am now going to join my workers in the summerhouse at the end of the South Walk. You, Ruth, and you, Olive, can come with me if you like, but if you prefer it, you are quite at liberty to join Evelyn's stall, for now that I have got Bridget's help I can do admirably without you."

Ruth and Olive looked more undecided than ever, but Evelyn said in a firm voice: "Of course, girls, you could not for a moment wish to desert Janet. I should like to say one thing before you go, Janet; it is this, that I am very much surprised at your pluck and bravery in getting up a bazaar of this sort. I am pleased to join it, and to do all I can to promote it. Under the circumstances, I should much prefer working as your aid-de-camp to taking the lead; but you are quite right in saying that the head girl of the school has certain privileges which, whether she likes it or not, she cannot forego. I must, of course, take the principal part at the bazaar, but I shall, in every way in my power, do what is most agreeable to you, and

will lose no opportunity to let my friends know that the idea is yours, not mine."

"You are very good-natured," said Janet, "but I, too, have something to say. Under the circumstances, I prefer sinking into the background. After all, the only person to be seriously considered is little Tim Donovan. If he is substantially helped I don't suppose it matters much what anyone thinks of us."

CHAPTER XI.

A WILD IRISH PRINCESS.

THE girls of the lower school were all busy with their preparation. Violet and Rose sat side by side. They had been chums for nearly a year now, and the fact was so fully recognized in the school that even their desks were placed close together. Violet was puzzling her little brains over a very difficult piece of French translation, Rose endeavoring to learn four or five long stanzas from Scott's "Lady of the Lake." They were both clever little girls, and, as a rule, their preparation was quickly over, and their tasks speedily conquered; but to-night there was a holiday feeling in the air; a sense of idleness pervaded everyone. Lessons seemed cruel, and the children rebelled against their tasks. They looked at one another, laughed, yawned, struggled with the listlessness which seized them, shot envious glances at their more studious companions, and absolutely refused to overcome the difficulties of the French translation and the English poetry.

The door between the lower schoolroom and the room occupied by the girls of the middle school had been thrown open, and from where the children sat they could see the pretty flounce of a pale blue muslin dress, and the provoking and exasperating peep of a little, pointed, blue Morocco shoe. The shoe evidently belonged to a restless foot, for it often appeared beneath

the flounce, to vanish as quickly, and then to poke itself into notice again.

"It's Biddy," whispered Violet in a low tone to Rose. "I don't believe she's learning her lessons a bit better than we are."

"She never learns them at all," answered Rose. "Janet does them for her now; don't you know that, Violet?"

"Hush!" said Violet, "we are disturbing Katie and Susy Martin, and they are such spiteful little cats, they are sure to tell on us. Hush! do hush, Rose! you ought not to say such things."

"I won't say them if you don't like," whispered Rose back again; "but they are true all the same."

Violet bent over her French translation. Rose made another frantic struggle to conquer "The Lady of the Lake."

The other children in the room were working with considerable industry; the little idlers in the corner had to suppress their emotions as best they could.

Rose had a very emphatic way; she was a stronger character than Violet, and in consequence had her little friend more or less under her thumb.

Violet had a great admiration for Biddy, and, as she was really an honorable and conscientious child, Rose's words shocked her very much.

The moments went by. The summer evening outside looked more beautiful and inviting each moment. After preparation was over, there was a treat in store for the children. This was Bridget O'Hara's birthday, and she was herself the giver of the treat. The children were to have a sort of supper-tea in the tent on the lawn, and afterward Biddy was going to give

each of them a little present in memory of the day.

The thought of Biddy's present and Biddy's treat had filled every little heart with a pleasant sense of excitement during the entire day; but Violet felt now that if Rose's words were really true she would not care to accept a keepsake from Bridget.

As she sat before her desk, too lazy, too languid, and at the same time too excited, to pay the smallest heed to her lessons, she could not help wishing that she could see something more of the blue frock than just that part which covered the pretty foot.

She slipped down lower and lower by her desk, and presently contrived to get a view of Bridget's desk. She could not see her face, but she could catch a glance of a plump young hand; it was quite still, it did not move, it did not turn a page. Violet could stand it no longer. In a moment of desperation she kicked off her slipper, and springing from her seat, bent low on the floor to pick it up.

From there she could see the whole of Biddy's figure. Oh, horror! her little heart went down to zero; Bridget O'Hara's head rested against her plump hand; she was fast asleep.

The shrill voice of mademoiselle was heard from her corner of the room:

"Reste tranquille, mon enfant; tu es bien ennuyeuse; est ce que tu ne sais pas que c'est l'heure de silence?"

Violet scrambled to her feet, and sat down before her French translation with a crimson face.

In the meanwhile a pale, quiet-looking girl had entered the room where the middle school were busy over their tasks, and, bending down by Bridget

O'Hara's side, took up an exercise she had just finished, and looked over it swiftly and eagerly.

"That is right," she said; "you will get good marks for this. Now, what about your arithmetic?"

"I have managed my sums fairly well, Janet; see," pulling an exercise-book forward. "I suppose they are all right, but they look very funny."

"They must be all right, dear. Let me see! Yes, yes; oh, what an incorrigibly stupid girl you are! This sum in compound subtraction has got the answer which should be attached to the compound addition sum. Quick, Bridget, give me your pen; I will score through these two lines, and then you must add the figures underneath yourself. That is right. What have you done with my——"

"Your copy, Janet? I was going to tear it up, as I had done with it."

"Don't do that, give it to me; it will be safest. Now, try and look over your poetry, Bridget. I will wait for you outside."

"Oh, that is easy enough; I shan't be any time. It's the first page or two of that delightful 'Ancient Mariner'; I can get it done in no time."

"Lucky for you. I will wait for you outside; I have something I want to say to you. Be quick, for all those small tots will be out immediately, and they'll want to take up every moment of your time. Give me those notes, however, before I go."

Bridget pulled some crumpled bits of paper out of her pocket, and thrust them into Janet's eager hand.

Miss May left the room, and Biddy, wide awake now, devoted herself to her poetry.

There was an eager, pleased, almost satisfied, expression on her face.

It was over a week now since Janet had taken her up. During that time she had, without in the least guessing the fact herself, been brought into a considerable state of discipline.

If she obeyed no one else in the school, Janet's slightest nod was sufficient for her.

It was Janet's present aim, whether by foul means or fair, to make Biddy appear both good and fascinating.

She did not want her captive to feel the end of her chain; she was clever enough to make Biddy her complete slave without allowing the slave to be conscious of her slavery.

The result of this week of very judicious slavery was, as far as externals went, highly beneficial.

Biddy had a gorgeous taste in the matter of dress. She wore her splendid garments with truly barbarian recklessness, overdressing herself on one occasion, being untidy and almost slovenly on another. A few suggestions, however, from Janet, altered all this, and the most fastidious person could now see nothing to object to in the clothes which adorned her beautifully proportioned figure, and the hats under which that charming and lovely face looked out.

To-night, Biddy's pale blue muslin, made simply, but with a lavish disregard to expense in the matter of lace and ribbons, was all that was appropriate; her crisp chestnut curls surrounded her fair face like a halo. There was a queer mixture of the woman and the child about her; she was by many degrees the most striking-looking girl in the school.

It took Biddy but a very few minutes to conquer the

difficulties of "The Ancient Mariner." She had a great aptitude for committing poetry to memory, and after repeating the stanzas two or three times under her breath, she slipped the book inside her desk and ran out.

To do this she had to go through the schoolroom where the little girls, Violet and Alice, were sitting mournfully in front of their unlearned lessons.

"Oh, you poor tots!" she said, struck by the expression on their wistful faces, "haven't you done yet? The feast is almost ready. I've ordered clothes baskets of strawberries, my dears, and quarts and quarts of cream."

"Silence, mademoiselle!" screamed the French teacher.

Bridget put her rosy fingers to her lips in mock solemnity, blew a kiss to all the children, and banged the door somewhat noisily behind her.

Violet's blue eyes sought Alice's; there was a world of entreaty in their meaning. Alice began, with feverish, forced energy, to mutter to herself:

"A chieftain's daughter seemed the maid."

Violet continued to gaze at her; then, taking up a scrap of paper, she scribbled on it:

"I don't believe that Janet helps Biddy with her lessons."

This scrap of paper was thrust into Alice's hand, who, in a moment, tossed a reply into Violet's lap:

"Yes, she does. You ask Honora Stedman or Jessie Sparkes."

Violet tore the paper into a thousand bits. Tears, she could scarcely tell why, dimmed her pretty eyes. She sank back in her seat, and resumed her lessons.

"Maintenant, mes enfants, l'heure de préparation est passée," said the French governess, rising, and speaking with her usual, quick little scream. "Mettez vos livres de côté; allons-nous à la fête donnée par la gracieuse Mlle. Bridget O'Hara."

The children jumped up with alacrity. Chairs scraped against the floor; desks were opened and books deposited therein more quickly than quietly, and then the whole eager group went out.

There was a large tent erected on the front lawn; gay flags were posted here and there round it, and a rustic porch had been hastily contrived at the entrance. This was crowned with many smaller flags, and was further rendered gay with bunches of wild flowers and ferns which had been fastened to it, under Bridget's supervision, early in the day.

The brilliant effect of the many colored flags and banners, the peep within the tent of tempting tables and many charming presents, excited the wild spirits of the little ones to an almost alarming degree.

Alice looked at Violet with a face full of ecstasy.

"*How* I love Biddy O'Hara!" she exclaimed. "Think of her getting up such a lovely, exquisite treat for us! Would any other girl think only of others on her birthday? Oh, I love her; I do love her!"

"But if she does really crib her lessons!" answered Violet, in a low tone of great sorrow. "O Alice, it can't be true."

"It is true," replied Alice; "but, for goodness' sake, Violet, don't fret yourself; it isn't our affair if Biddy chooses to do wrong. Whether she does right or wrong, I shall still maintain that she's a dear, generous darling. Do come on now, Violet, and let us enjoy

ourselves." Alice caught her little companion's hand as she spoke, and the two children ran down the rather steep grassy incline to the tent.

Most of their companions had arrived before them, and when they entered under the flower-crowned porch, they found themselves in the midst of a very gay and attractive scene. Bridget, with two or three older girls of the school, was entertaining the children with strong sweet tea, piles of bread and butter, cakes of various sizes and shapes, and quantities of strawberries, which were further supplemented with jugs of rich cream.

Violet and Alice seated themselves at once at one end of the long table, and the merry feast went on.

What laughter there was at it, what childish jokes, what little harmless, affectionate, mirthful repartees! Bridget O'Hara's face wore its sweetest expression. The Irish girl had never looked more in her element. Frances Murray and Dorothy, who were both helping her, had never seen Bridget look like this. She showed herself capable of two things: of giving others the most intense pleasure and enjoyment, and absolutely forgetting herself.

Dorothy had not felt kindly disposed to Bridget during the past week. Bridget's conduct, Bridget's extraordinary reserve, the marked way in which she resented small overtures of friendship from Evelyn Percival, hurt her feelings a great deal; but to-night Dorothy Collingwood felt her heart going out to Biddy in a new, unexpected way.

"I agree with Evelyn," she said suddenly, turning round and speaking to Frances Murray.

"About what, my dear?" retorted that young lady. "You generally do agree with Evelyn, you know."

"Don't tease me, Frances; of course we're chums, but I hold, and always will hold, my own opinions. I agree with her now, however. I agree with her with regard to Bridget O'Hara."

"Biddy looks very sweet to-night," replied Frances, "but surely Evelyn cannot care about her."

"Biddy has been very nasty to Evelyn," answered Dolly. "Of course, I know who is really to blame for it. Still I thought Biddy would have more spirit than to be led in a matter of this sort. But do you think Evelyn resents this sort of thing? Not a bit of her. She is just as sweet and good about it all as she can be, and she said to me, what I am really inclined to believe, that if Biddy is only done justice to, there won't be a nobler woman in the world than she."

"Oh, fudge!" said Frances; "I grant that she does look very sweet now, but it's just like Evelyn to go to the fair with things, and it's just like you, Dolly, to believe her. Come, come, the little ones cannot eat another strawberry, however hard they try, and Bridget is going up to the end of the tent to distribute the presents."

"Let us see," replied Dolly.

The two girls went up to the far end of the tent, where a little table covered with a crimson cloth stood; on this Bridget had placed her small gifts.

They were all minute, but all dainty. They had arrived from Paris, a few nights ago, in a small box. Thimbles in charming little cases, dainty workboxes, writing cases, penholders, dolls, photograph frames, boxes of colors, etc., etc., lay in profusion on the pretty table.

Biddy stood by her presents, a bright light in her

eyes, a bright color on her cheeks. The two elder girls, who stood in the background, could not help a sudden pang as they watched her. There was something about her mien and bearing which made them, for the first time, clearly understand that this girl was a wild Irish princess at home. For the first time they got an insight into Biddy's somewhat complex character.

"Come here, darlings," she said to the children in her sweet, rather low-pitched voice. "I am glad to give you a little bit of pleasure. It is the best sort of thing that can happen to me, now that I'm away from father. Had you enough to eat, pets?"

"Oh, yes, Biddy, oh, yes!" they all cried.

"That's right. I thought you would. We have lots of feasts of this sort at the Castle. The children aren't like you, of course; they live, half of them, down in the cabins near the water's edge, and they come up with their little bare feet, and their curly heads that have never known hat nor bonnet, and their eyes as blue as a bit of the sky, or as black as the sloes in the hedges. Oh, they are pets every one of them, with their soft voices, and their little prim courtesies, and their 'Thank you, kind lady,' and their 'Indeed, then, it's thrue for ye, that I'm moighty honored by ateing in the sight of yer honor.' Ah, I can hear them now, the pets! and don't they like the presents afterward, and don't they send up three cheers for father and me before they go away! They are all having a feast to-night at the Castle in honor of my birthday, and father is there, and all the dogs, but I'm away; I expect they're a bit lonesome, poor dears, without Biddy, but never mind! You have all been very good to let me give you a little feast, my dear darling pets."

There was a great pathos in Biddy's words; the children felt more inclined to cry than to laugh; Dolly felt a lump in her throat, and even Frances looked down on the ground for a second, but when there was a brief pause Frances raised her hand, and waved it slightly as a signal.

This was enough, all the hands were raised, all the handkerchiefs waved, and from every throat there rose a "Hip! hip! hurrah!" and "Three cheers for the Irish princess!"

"Many happy returns of the day," said Frances, and then all the children repeated her words.

"You must not add any more," exclaimed Biddy. "I don't wish to cry; I want to be happy, as I ought to be when you are all so nice and good to me. I may as well say frankly that I did not at all like school at first, but I do now. If you are all affectionate and loving, and if Janet goes on being kind to me, I shall like school, and I shan't mind so much being broken in."

"Poor Biddy," exclaimed Dorothy, turning to her companion; "she reminds me of the lovely silver-winged horse Pegasus. She does not like the taming process."

"No, my dear, that's true," replied Frances; "but Pegasus grew very fond of Bellerophon in the end."

"Only I deny," said Dolly, "that Janet is in the least like Bellerophon."

"Listen!" exclaimed Frances.

"I am going to give you your presents now," said Bridget. "Come here, each of you in turn."

The children pressed eagerly to the front, and Biddy put a small gift into each of their hands.

"Now come for a walk with me," she said. "I shall

"NOW COME FOR A WALK WITH ME."—*p.* 124.

tell you a fairy story—a very short one; it pleased the barefooted children at home, and I dare say it will please you. After that you must go to bed."

It was really late now. The sun had set, but there was an after-glow all over the sky, and the moon was showing her calm, full, round face above the horizon.

Alice linked her hand inside Biddy's arm, the other children surrounded her, and Violet felt herself pressed up to her other side.

On another occasion Violet would have taken Biddy's arm, and held it tight. She did not do so to-night; she walked quietly by her side, holding a lovely jointed doll in her arms.

Bridget told a wonderful fairy tale, but Violet's eyes were fixed on her doll, and her thoughts were far away.

The other children cheered and applauded, and questioned and criticised, but Violet was absolutely silent.

At last the gong in the great house sounded. This was the signal for all the little ones to go to bed. They each of them pressed up to kiss Bridget, and thank her for the lovely treat she had given them. Each one after she had kissed her friend ran into the house.

At last Violet was the only child left. Even Alice ran off, but Violet stood in the middle of the gravel walk, clasping her doll in her arms.

"What is the matter, Vi?" asked Bridget. "Don't you like the doll? Would you rather I exchanged it for something else?"

Alice had climbed the steep grassy slope. She stood on the summit, and shouted down into the gathering darkness:

"Come, Violet, come at once, or you'll be late!"

"Kiss me, Violet, and run to bed," said Bridget. "If you don't like the doll, I'll exchange it to-morrow."

"But I do like the doll," said Violet. "I love it! It isn't that, Biddy. May I ask you something?"

"Of course you may, you little darling. How pale you look. What's the matter, Vi?"

"Is it true, Biddy, that you crib your lessons? Alice says it's true; but I don't believe her."

Bridget had knelt down by Violet in her earnest desire to comfort her. She rose now to her feet, and stood erect and tall in the moonlight. After a very brief pause, she spoke in a haughty tone:

"Alice says that I crib?" she repeated. "What do you English girls mean by 'cribbing'?"

"Alice says—oh, please don't be angry, Biddy—she says that Janet helps you; that Janet does—does *some* of your lessons for you, herself. I don't believe it! I said it wasn't true."

"You are a good little soul," said Biddy.

She took the child's hand within her own.

"What a plucky little thing you are, Vi. So you think it wrong to crib?"

"I think it wrong to crib?" repeated Violet. "I think it wrong to crib? Why, of course; it is *most un*honorable."

Bridget colored.

"That's what you English think," she said, in a would-be careless tone; "but when a girl doesn't know, and when she's quite certain to get into all sorts of scrapes—eh, Vi—you tell me what a girl of that sort has got to do?"

"She must not crib," said Violet, in a shaky and intensely earnest little voice; "it's most awfully un-

honorable of her; a girl who cribs must feel so—so mean. If it was me, I'd rather have all the punishments in the school than feel as mean as *that*. But you don't crib, Biddy, darling; you are so lovely, and you are so sweet; I know—I *know you don't crib*."

Bridget O'Hara had been tempted by Janet into a very dishonorable course of action, but no spoken lie had ever yet passed her lips.

When Violet looked up at her with the moonlight reflected on her little pale, childish, eager face, Biddy felt the hour for that first lie had arrived. She thought that she would do anything in the world rather than crush the love and the eager trust which shone out of Violet's eyes.

"Of course I don't crib," she was about to say; but suddenly, like a flash, she turned away.

"I'm sorry to destroy your faith in me, Vi," she said, in a would-be careless tone; "but though I have done a very 'unhonorable' thing, as you call it, I really can't tell a lie about it. I do crib, if cribbing means taking Janet's help when I learn my lessons."

The faint roses which Violet wore in her cheeks faded out of them.

"I'm awfully sorry for you," she said. "I didn't believe it a bit when Alice said it; I wouldn't believe it now from anyone but yourself. There's the doll back again, Biddy; I—I can't keep it, Biddy."

She pushed the waxen beauty into Bridget's arms, and rushed back to the house.

CHAPTER XII.

LADY KATHLEEN.

FOR the past week, Janet May had managed, through her tact and cleverness, to make Bridget's life quite comfortable to her. She had shown her a way in which she could obey the rules and yet not feel the fetters. She imparted to Bridget some of that strange and fatal secret which leads to death in the long run, but which at first shows many attractions to its victims. Bridget might live at the school, and have a very jolly, and even independent time; all she had to do was to obey the letter and break the spirit.

In point of acquirements, Biddy could scarcely hold a place even in the middle school. She had many talents, but her education had never been properly attended to. During the last week, however, she had made rapid progress in her studies; she had been moved up a whole class, and was steadily getting to the top of her present one. Her masters and mistresses praised her, and these words of approval proved themselves extremely sweet, and spurred her on to make genuine efforts in those studies for which she had really a talent. Biddy's English was perhaps her weakest point. Her spelling was atrocious; her writing resembled a series of hieroglyphics; her sums were faulty; her history was certainly fable, not fact.

She could speak French perfectly; her marks, there-

fore, in this tongue were always good. Now her English, too, began to assume quite a respectable appearance; her sums were invariably correct; her spelling irreproachable; her various themes were well expressed, and her facts were incontestable. She was making her way rapidly through the middle school, and Mrs. Freeman said that she had every reason to hope that so clever a girl might take her place in the upper school by the beginning of the next term.

As it was, Bridget was accorded a few of the privileges of the upper school. One of these privileges was very much prized; she might spend her evenings, once preparation was over, exactly as she pleased.

After Violet's unexpected reproof she came slowly into the house. She had that uncertain temperament which is so essentially Irish; her spirits could rise like a bird on the wing, or they could fall into the lowest depths of despondency.

She had felt gay and joyful while her birthday treat was going on; now as she entered the house she could scarcely drag one leaden step after the other.

Janet was standing in the stone passage which led to the common room, when Biddy passed by.

"I have been waiting for you," she said, in a rather cross voice. "What an age you've been! Surely the treat need not have been followed by a whole wasted hour afterward?"

"I was telling the children a story," said Biddy; "the story was part of the treat."

Janet's thin lips curled somewhat sarcastically.

"Well, come now," she said; "the committee have all assembled in the common room, and we're only waiting for you to begin."

"You must do without me to-night," said Bridget; "I have got a headache, and I'm going to bed." She turned abruptly away, utterly disregarding Janet's raised brows of astonishment, and the faint little disagreeable laugh which followed her as she went upstairs.

Bridget's room adjoined the one occupied by Evelyn Percival. As Bridget was entering her bedroom, Evelyn was coming out of hers.

"Had you a nice treat?" she said, stopping for a moment to speak to Bridget. "You never asked me to come and look on, and I should have enjoyed it so much."

"But you're the head girl of the school; my treat was only for the little ones," said Bridget, in a cold tone.

"I love treats for little ones," said Evelyn, "and I think it was so nice of you to think of it. Aren't you coming down to the committee, Miss O'Hara? This is the evening when we arrange our different contributions. You know, of course, that the bazaar is only a week off."

"I don't care when it is held," said Biddy; "there never was such a stupid fuss made about anything as that bazaar; I'm sick of the subject. No, Miss Percival, I'm not going to join the committee to-night."

"Well, good-night, then," said Evelyn.

She ran downstairs, and Biddy shut herself into her own room and locked the door.

About an hour later the other girls went to bed. Biddy unlocked her door, and getting between the sheets just as she was, in her pretty blue muslin frock, waited until all the house was still. Miss Delicia usually visited the girls the last thing before going to bed. She came into Bridget's room as usual, but

noticed nothing wrong. The top of a curly head was seen above the sheet. Miss Delicia stepped lightly on tiptoe out of the room, and a few moments later the large house, with its many inmates, was wrapped in profound silence.

When this silence had lasted about a quarter of an hour, Biddy raised herself on her elbow, and listened intently; then she threw aside the bedclothes, and stepped lightly on to the floor. Her slippers were discarded, and her little stockinged feet made no sound as she walked across the boards. She managed to open her door without its making a single creak, and a few moments later, guided by the moon, she was standing in the deserted schoolroom, and was unlocking her school desk. From out of it she took three very neat looking exercise-books. From each of these books she tore a page. These three pages she deliberately reduced to the minutest fragments; returned the books to her desk, locked it, and went back to bed.

No one had heard her go or come. When she laid her head once more on her pillow a little sob escaped her lips.

"You shan't ever say I'm unhonorable again, Violet," she muttered; some tears stole from under her thick, curly lashes. Two or three minutes afterward she had dropped into profound and peaceful slumber.

The next day at lesson time Bridget O'Hara was in extreme disgrace. She had no exercises, either good or bad, to show; not the most careless or untidy notes had she with regard to her history lesson; her geography had simply not been prepared at all.

Biddy went to the bottom of her class, where she stayed for the remainder of the morning.

She was to learn her lessons during the hours of recreation, and was told by her indignant teachers that she might consider herself in great disgrace.

She received this announcement with complacency, and sat with a contented, almost provoking, smile hovering round her lips.

Morning school being over, the girls went out to play as usual; but Biddy sat in the schoolroom with her sums, history lesson, and geography all waiting to get accomplished.

"You have been a good girl lately, Bridget; you have prepared your lessons carefully and cleverly," said Miss Dent, the English teacher. "I am quite sure, therefore, that you will speedily retrieve the great carelessness of this morning. I am willing to make all allowances for you, my dear, for we none of us forget that yesterday was your birthday. Now, just give your attention to these lessons, and you will have them nicely prepared by dinner time."

"I don't believe I shall," said Bridget, with a comical expression. She bent over her books as she spoke, and Miss Dent, feeling puzzled, she did not know why, left the room.

A moment later Janet came in.

"What is the matter?" asked Janet. "I have just met Miss Dent, who tells me that you failed in your three English lessons this morning. How can that be? Your grammar and English history and geography were perfect last night. They had not a single mistake!"

"You mean," said Bridget, raising her eyes and looking full at Janet, "that *your* grammar and geography and English history were perfect last night."

Janet shrugged her shoulders.

"It's all the same," she said. "I told you that I'd help you with your lessons, and I shall keep my word. How is it that you have managed to get into disgrace, after all the trouble I have taken for you?"

"You are never to take it again, Janet; that is all!"

"Never to take it again! Dear me, what a very superior voice we can use when we like! And has our 'first' sweet little 'gem of the ocean' discovered that her own mighty genius can tide her over all school troubles?"

"I'm not going to be afraid of you, Janet," said Biddy. "Of course, you've been awfully kind to me, and I'm not ungrateful. But something—something *happened* last night which made me see that I've been a mean, horrid, deceitful girl to let you help me at all, and you are not to do it again; that's all."

"What happened last night to open your virtuous eyes?"

"I'm not going to say."

"Have any of the girls found out?"

Janet turned decidedly pale as she asked this question.

"I'm not going to say."

"You don't mean to hint to me, Bridget, that you have told the teachers about what I have done?"

"Of course I haven't, Janet. But I'll tell you what I did do. I went down last night when all the other girls—you among them—were sleeping the sleep of the just, and I tore a sheet out of each of these books; the sheet which you had so carefully prepared for me last night. That's why I had no English lessons, good, bad, or indifferent, to show this morning."

Janet stood quite silent for a moment or two; her

delicately formed fingers beat an impatient tattoo on the top of Biddy's desk.

"You can please yourself, of course," she said, after a pause. "You can wade through your lessons as best you can, and sink to your proper position, you great big baby, in the lower school. You have shown a partiality for the little children. You are likely to see enough of them in future, for you will belong to them."

"They are dear little creatures, much nicer than any of the big girls, except Dolly. I'd rather be with them and do right than stay in the middle school, or even the upper, and feel as I did last night."

"It is delightful to see what a tender conscience you have got! I confess I did not know of its existence until to-day, but I congratulate you most heartily on such a priceless possession. It will be a great relief to me, not to have to worry any more about your lessons. For the future I wash my hands of you."

"Am I not to be your chum any more, then, Janet?"

Bridget looked up, with decided relief on her face.

Janet saw the look. Her brow darkened; she had to make a great effort to suppress the strong dislike which filled her breast. Bridget, however, was rich; she might be useful.

"Of course, we are chums still," she said in a hasty voice. "It is your own fault if I don't do as much for you as I promised. You are a great little goose to reject the help which I am giving you. Your father sent you to school in order that you might learn; you can't learn if you are not helped. However, it's your own affair; but if you ever let out to mortal that I gave you

this assistance your life won't be worth living, that's all."

"I'm not a bit afraid of your threats, Janet; but I won't tell, of course."

"I say," exclaimed Janet, suddenly rushing to the window, "what a nice carriage, and what fine horses! Who in the world can be coming to Mulberry Court now?"

Bridget had again bent over her lessons. They were hopelessly difficult. It was on the tip of her tongue to say:

"Janet, how am I to parse this sentence?" But she restrained herself.

Janet had forgotten all about her. She was gazing at the beautiful carriage and spirited horses with eyes full of curiosity.

The carriage, a smart little victoria, contained only one occupant. The horses were pawing the ground impatiently now; the lady had disappeared into the house.

"I say," exclaimed Janet, turning to Bridget; but whatever further words she meant to utter were arrested on her lips. There was the swishing sound of voluminous draperies in the passage, a gay, quick voice could be distinguished pouring out eager utterances, and the next moment the room door was opened hastily, and a lady rushed in.

She was immediately followed by Miss Patience, who seemed somewhat amazed.

"Really, Lady Kathleen——" she began.

"Now, my dear Miss Patience, don't interrupt me. "I know what a good soul you are; but if you think I'm going to sit in your drawing room waiting until that

precious child is brought to me, you are finely mistaken. Ah, and here you are, my treasure! Come into Aunt Kitty's arms!"

"Aunt Kathleen!" exclaimed Bridget.

She rushed from her seat, upsetting a bottle of ink as she did so, and found herself clasped in a voluminous embrace.

"Now that's good," said Lady Kathleen. "I'll write full particulars about you to Dennis to-night. And how are you, my pet? And how do you like school? Are they very cross? Oh, *I* know them! I was here long ago myself. Patience, do you remember how you used to insist upon punishing the girls, and dear old Delicia used to beg them off? I expect you are just the same as ever you were. Does Miss Patience give you many punishments, my ducky, and does Miss Delicia beg you off?"

"I'll leave you now, Lady Kathleen," said Miss Patience, still in her stiff voice. "If you really prefer staying in this room to the comfortable drawing room, I cannot help it. Of course, you will remain to dinner? Mrs. Freeman will be delighted to see you again."

"Dear Mrs. Freeman! If there's a woman in the world I respect, she's the one. But stay a moment, Miss Patience; I'll come and see Mrs. Freeman another time. I want to take this dear child off with me now to Eastcliff for the day, and I'd be delighted if her young companion would come too. What's your name, my love?"

"May," replied Janet.

"May? What a nice little flowery sort of title. Well, I want you to come and spend the day with me, May."

"My name is Janet May."

"It's all the same, I expect. Now, Miss Patience, may I take these two sweet children to Eastcliff? I'll promise to have them back under your sheltering wings by nine o'clock this evening."

Miss Patience hesitated for a moment, but Lady Kathleen Peterham was not a person to be lightly offended.

"It is very kind of you," she said, "and also most natural that you should wish to have your niece with you. But Janet——"

"Oh, come, come," said Lady Kathleen, with a hearty laugh, "I want to have them both, dear children. Run upstairs, now, both of you, and make yourselves as smart as smart can be. While the girls are getting ready, you and I can have a little talk, Patience. Run, my loves, run, make yourselves scarce."

Bridget and Janet both left the room. All the crossness had now disappeared from Janet's face. She was in high good humor, and even condescended to link her hand inside Bridget's arm as they mounted the stairs to their bedrooms.

Janet had very quiet and very good taste in dress. She came downstairs presently in a dove-colored cashmere, a black lace hat on her head, and dove-colored gloves on her hands. A pretty black lace parasol completed her ladylike attire. There was nothing expensive about her simple toilet, but it was youthful, refined, and suitable.

Biddy did not return so quickly to the schoolroom. Alas! alas! she was given *carte blanche* with regard to her dress. Miss O'Hara loved gay clothing. She came out of her room at last bedizened with fluttering

ribbons, wherever ribbons could be put. Her dress was of shimmering sea green; she wore a large white hat, trimmed with enormous ostrich feathers; white kid gloves were drawn up her arms. Her parasol was of white lace, interspersed with bows of sea-green velvet. This gorgeous costume had not before seen the light. It suited Biddy, whose radiant sort of beauty could bear any amount of dress. Beside this splendid young person, quiet Janet May seemed to sink into utter insignificance. Miss Patience gave a gasp when Bridget appeared, but Lady Kathleen Peterham smiled with broad satisfaction.

"Ah!" she said, rising from her chair, "I call that costume really tasty. The moment I saw it at Worth's I knew it would suit you, Biddy, down to the ground. No, you naughty child, I'd be afraid even to whisper to you what it cost; but come along now, both of you, or we'll be late for all our fun. Miss Patience, I see you are lost in admiration of Bridget's turn-out."

"I must be frank with you, Lady Kathleen," said Miss Patience. "I consider your niece's dress most unsuitable—the child is only fifteen. A white muslin, with a blue ribbon belt, is the fitting costume for her, and not all that tomfoolery. You'll excuse me, Lady Kathleen; I think you and Mr. O'Hara make a great mistake in overdressing Miss Biddy as you do."

"Oh, come, come," said Lady Kathleen, "Bridget is my poor dear sister's only child, and my brother-in-law and I can't make too much of her. In school hours, of course, she can be as plain as you please, but out of school——" The lady raised her eyebrows, and her expression spoke volumes.

"Come, my dear," she said.

A moment later the gay little victoria was bowling back to Eastcliff, and Lady Kathleen was pouring out a volley of eager remarks to Janet May. The change from the dull routine of school life bewildered and delighted sober Janet; she forgot her habitual reserve, and became almost communicative. Biddy, notwithstanding all her fine feathers, seemed for some reason or other slightly depressed, but Janet had never known herself in better spirits.

"What a sweet companion you are for my niece!" said Lady Kathleen. "You may be quite sure, my love, that I'll tell my brother-in-law all about you. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he invited you to the Castle for the holidays. I shall be there, and we are going to have all kinds of gay doings. Eh, Biddy, love, what do you say to having your pretty school friend with you? Why, how pensive you look, my deary!"

"When I see you, Aunt Kathleen, I cannot help thinking of father and the dogs," said Bridget abruptly. She turned her head away as she spoke.

"Oh, my darling, the dogs; that recalls something to my mind. Minerva has had four pups, elegant little creatures, thoroughbred, every one of them. Dennis telegraphed their arrival to me last night."

Janet thought this information highly uninteresting, but Biddy's cheeks quite flamed with excitement. She asked innumerable and eager questions, and absorbed all Lady Kathleen's attention until they reached the gay hotel where the lady was staying at Eastcliff.

Lady Kathleen Peterham had a suite of rooms to herself, and no pains were spared to make these as luxurious and beautiful as possible. The wide balconies of her drawing room, which looked directly over the

sea, were gay with many brilliant and lovely flowers. They were also protected from the rays of the sun by cool green-and-white striped awnings.

Lunch was ready when the girls arrived, but immediately afterward Lady Kathleen took them out to sit on the balcony with her.

"We will have our ices and coffee here, Johnson," she said to the servant who waited on them.

As she spoke, she sank into a comfortable chair, and taking up a large crimson fan, began to move it slowly backward and forward before her somewhat heated face.

Lady Kathleen was still a very handsome woman. Her blue eyes resembled Bridget's in their brightness and vivacity; but her skin, brows, and hair were much darker, and her expression, although vivacious and winning, had not that charming innocence about it which marked Bridget's young face.

Lady Kathleen was a woman of about five-and-thirty. She was made on a large scale, and the first slenderness of youth was already lost. She had seen a great deal of what she called "life," for she had married early, and had lived almost ever since in Paris with her husband.

Hers was a somewhat frivolous nature. She was imprudent, injudicious, incapable of really guiding the young; but, at the same time, she was the soul of good nature, and would not willingly have hurt the smallest living creature.

Janet could not help being greatly impressed by Lady Kathleen. If there was one point more strongly developed than another in Janet's character it was her worldliness. She was a lady by birth, but she was poor. Some day Janet knew that she would have to

earn her own living. She had the most intense repect, therefore, for those people who were blessed with an abundance of this world's goods. Hers was naturally a cold, cynical, and calculating nature. Bridget was, in reality, not in the least to her taste, but the rumors of Bridget's wealth had always been pleasant to listen to. On account of these rumors, Janet had done what she considered good service to the willful and headstrong schoolgirl.

She felt highly pleased now with her own worldly wisdom, as she sat under the shelter of the green-and-white awning, and ate strawberry ices, and sipped her coffee.

Lady Kathleen was, in all respects, a woman to Janet's taste. She had the *savoir faire* which impresses young girls. Janet's respect for Bridget increased tenfold when she saw that she was related to such a woman, and she wondered to herself how the aunt could have so much style and the niece be so *gauche*.

Lady Kathleen, who was determined to make the day delightful to her young companions, questioned Janet eagerly with regard to her school and school pursuits.

"Now, my darling," she said, "you must tell me about your little world. I know what school is. I was at school myself for many a weary year. At school there always is a big excitement going on. What's the present one?"

Biddy had seated herself close to the edge of the balcony, and was looking out over the sea. She was thinking of the Castle, and of Minerva, and of the cherished litter of pups; of her father's excitement, and Pat Donovan's raptures, and Norah Mahoney's comments.

She saw the Irish serving man and woman gesticulating and exclaiming; she saw her father's white hair and weatherbeaten, eagle face, and could almost hear his deep tones of satisfaction as he bent over Minerva, and patted her wise head.

"Biddy!" shrieked Lady Kathleen; "Biddy, child, wake up! What in the world have you gone off into one of those brown studies for? Here's this dear little Janet telling me that you're going to have a Fancy Fair at Mulberry Court."

"Oh, yes, Aunt Kathie," said Bridget; "I believe we are."

"Well, child, and isn't that a bright, lively sort of amusement for you? And the bazaar is to be for a charitable object, too? Splendid! splendid! Why, Dennis will be quite delighted when I tell him. I always said the Court was the right school for you, Biddy. It gives a sort of all-round training. It isn't only accomplishments—tinkle, tinkle on the piano, and that sort of thing—hearts are also thought of, and trained properly to think of others. Well, darlings, I'm very much pleased about the bazaar, and this good little Janet tells me that it is her idea; most creditable to her. You are the head of the whole thing, are you not, Janet?"

"No," said Janet, trying to speak in a calm, indifferent voice; "of course *I* don't mind; I *can't* mind, but one of Mrs. Freeman's strictest rules is that seniority goes before all else. I am not the head girl of the school, Lady Kathleen; the head girl's name is Evelyn Percival, and, although I was the one to think of the Fancy Fair, and although Evelyn was away from the school during the first two or three weeks while the

matter was being planned out and we were getting materials ready for our stalls, still, the moment she came home, Mrs. Freeman insisted on our asking her to join the committee, and since then she has taken the lead, and hers will be the principal stall on the day of the fair."

"And you'll be nowhere, so to speak?" said Lady Kathleen.

"Well, I don't know that; I hope to have a pretty stall too; Bridget is helping me with my stall; aren't you, Biddy?"

"I don't know that I am," replied Bridget. "Father sent me a little money to buy a few pretty things, and that was about all that I could do. I love pretty things, but I am no worker."

She turned away as she spoke, and once more looked out over the sea with longing in her eyes.

Lady Kathleen had a keen perception of character. Janet had spoken in a very quiet, subdued voice, but the fact was by no means lost on the good lady that she was terribly chagrined at the position she was obliged to occupy at the fair.

"Confess, my little one; you don't like being second," she said, bending over her and tapping her fair head with the large crimson fan.

Janet colored faintly. "'What can't be cured,'" she said, shrugging her shoulders.

Lady Kathleen took up the proverb and finished it. "'Must be endured,'" she said. "But I don't believe that this position of affairs can't be cured. It strikes me as extremely unfair that you should have had the trouble of getting up this fair, and then that you should be pushed into a second position. I don't care

if fifty Mrs. Freemans say you are not to be first. I don't choose that my niece, Bridget O'Hara, should have anything to do with a second-rate stall; or a second-rate position. Wake up, Biddy, child, and listen to me; I insist upon one thing—you and Janet are to be first on the day of the fair."

Janet's eyes began to sparkle, and the faint glow in her cheeks grew bright and fixed. Her eager expression spoke volumes, but she did not utter a word. Bridget, however, exclaimed wearily:

"Oh, what does it matter who is first! Besides, whether you like it or not, Aunt Kathie, you can't alter matters. Mrs. Freeman is mistress in her own school; and if she decides that Evelyn is to take the lead, Evelyn will take the lead, no matter whether you wish it or not, fifty times over."

"My good little Biddy, you are a bit of an innocent for all you are growing such a fine big girl—the pride of your father's heart, and the light of your old auntie's eyes! Little Janet has more wisdom than twenty great handsome creatures like you. Now, my pets, you listen to me; we'll manage this matter by *guile*. Miss Percival may have the first stall at the bazaar, if she likes. Who cares twopence about that? You, Janet, and you, Biddy, will have the stall that all the visitors will flock to. You leave me to manage the matter; I'll make your stall so lovely that all the others will sink into insignificance."

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed Janet; "how—*how* good you are!"

"I will do it, my dear, I certainly will; the honor of the O'Haras is involved in this matter. Now, girls, you just put on your hats, and we'll go round East-

cliff, and see if we can't pick up a basketful of pretty trifles for you to take home with you this evening. Of course, they will be nothing to what will presently follow, but they'll just do for a beginning. You leave it to me, my loves; leave it all to me. This great, grand, wise Evelyn Percival can't compete with Paris and the Rue Rivoli; you leave it all to me."

"How kind you are," said Janet again.

"Don't thank me," said Lady Kathleen, rising; "it's for the honor of the O'Haras. Whoever yet heard of an O'Hara eating humble pie, or taking a second position anywhere? Now, girls, run into my room, and make yourselves smart as smart can be, for we have plenty to do with our time, I can assure you."

The rest of the day passed for Janet in a sort of delicious dream. Money seemed as plentiful to Lady Kathleen Peterham as the pebbles on the seashore. Janet almost gasped as she saw the good lady take one gold piece after another out of her purse to expend on the merest nothings. Lady Kathleen had exquisite taste, however, and many useless but beautiful ornaments were carefully tucked away in the large basket which was to be taken to Mulberry Court that evening.

"I shall go to Paris on Monday," said Lady Kathleen; "I will telegraph to my husband to expect me. When is your bazaar? next Thursday? I shall be back at Eastcliff on Wednesday at the latest. One day in Paris will effect my purpose. I mean to attend this bazaar myself, and I mean to bring several friends. Do your best, loves, in the meantime to make as creditable a show as possible, but leave the final arrange-

ments, the crowning dash of light, color, and beauty to me."

When the two girls were starting for Mulberry Court in the evening, Lady Kathleen opened her purse and put five golden sovereigns into Biddy's hand. "I don't know how you are off for pocket money, my pet," she said, "but here's something to keep you going. Now, good-night, dears; good-night to you both."

CHAPTER XIII.

PEARSON'S BOOK OF ESSAYS.

NOW that the break-up day was so near, nothing was talked of in the school but the coming examinations, the prizes, and the delightful fair which was to bring such honor and renown to Mulberry Court. The school resembled a little busy hive of eager, animated workers. Even play during these last days was forgotten, and everyone, from the eldest to the youngest, was pressed into the service of the fair.

When the matter was first proposed, Mrs. Freeman had said to the girls: "You are abundantly welcome to try the experiment. My share will consist in giving you a large marquee or tent; everything else you must do yourselves. I shall invite people to see your efforts and to buy your wares. Each girl who contributes to the bazaar will be allowed to ask two or three guests to be present; the only stipulation I have to make is that you don't produce a failure; you are bound, for the honor of the school, to make the fair a success."

The programme for the great day was something as follows: The examinations were to be held in the morning. Immediately afterward the prize-winners would receive their awards; there would be an interval for dinner; and at three o'clock the great fair would be opened, and sales would continue until dusk.

The girls who were to sell at the stalls were all to be dressed in white with green ribbons. Mrs. Freeman had herself selected this quiet and suitable dress; she had done this with a special motive, for she was particularly anxious that Biddy should have no opportunity of displaying her finery.

The evening before the great and important day arrived. Evelyn had purchased a great many useful and beautiful articles for her stall. She and Dolly were to be the saleswomen; and Mrs. Freeman had arranged that the principal stall should be at the top end of the large marquee. Janet felt a sarcastic smile curling her lips when this arrangement was made.

"It does not really matter," she said to herself; "Bridget's and my stall will be exactly in the center. The light from the entrance to the tent will fall full upon it. After all, we shall have a better position, even than that occupied by the head stall." She kept her thoughts to herself. Her spirits had never been better, her manners never more amiable, than since the day of her visit to Lady Kathleen. The girls who were working under her were very busy, and much delighted with the basket of beautiful things which had been brought from Eastcliff, but about any further contributions Janet was absolutely silent.

On the afternoon of the day before the bazaar, Bridget came into the bedroom which was shared by Janet and one other girl. "Mrs. Freeman tells me that you are going into Eastcliff," she said.

"Yes," replied Janet, "I'm to drive in with Marshall. "There has been a mistake about some of the confectionery, and Mrs. Freeman wants me to go to Dovedale's, in the High Street, without delay, to order

some more cheese cakes, creams, and jellies. Frances Murray ought really to attend to this, for she is to manage the refreshment stall, but she happens to be in bed with a stupid headache. What's the matter, Bridget? How excited you look! and, good gracious, my dear! you have been crying; your eyes have red rims round them."

"I have had a letter from home," said Bridget, "and Pat Donovan is ill: he fell off the ladder and hurt his back. Norah Mahoney wrote about him—she's awfully troubled. Poor Norah, she engaged to Pat, you know; she's says he's very bad, poor boy!"

"Who in the world is Pat Donovan? and who is Norah Mahoney?" asked Janet, as she hastily drew on her gauntlet gloves. "Friends of yours, of course. But I never heard of them before."

"They are very dear friends of mine," replied Bridget; "they are two of the servants; I love them very much. Poor, poor Pat! Norah has been engaged to him for years and years, and now only to think of his being hurt so dreadfully! Norah wrote me such a sad letter. I'll read it to you, if you like."

"No thanks, my dear; I really have no time to listen to the sorrows of your servants. It is too absurd, Bridget, to go on like that! Why, you're crying again, you great baby! I thought, when you spoke of them, that you meant people in your own rank."

"I won't tell you any more!" said Biddy, coloring crimson. "You have no heart, or you wouldn't speak in that horrid tone! Dear, dear Pat! I'm ten thousand times fonder of him than I am of anyone else in the world, except father and the dogs, and, perhaps,

Aunt Kathleen. I used to ride on his shoulder all over the farm when I was quite a little tot!"

"Well, my dear, I must run now. I am sorry that I can't sympathize with you."

"Yes; but, Janet, one moment. I want to send a little present to Pat; I can, for Aunt Kathleen gave me five pounds. I want to send him a post-office order for two pounds, and I want to know if you will get it for me. Here's the letter, all written, and here are the two sovereigns. Will you get a postal order and put it into the letter for me, Janet, and then post it at Eastcliff?"

"But you are going home yourself in a couple of days."

"Oh! that doesn't matter; I wouldn't leave Pat a hour longer than I could help without his letter. You may fancy how fond I am of him, when I tell you that he has the care of Minerva and the pups."

"I think you're a great goose," said Janet. "But there's no time to argue. Give me the money, child, and let me go."

"Be sure you post the letter in good time," said Bridget. "Here it is; I haven't closed it."

She laid the directed envelope on Janet's dressing table, put the two sovereigns on the top of it, and ran off.

The whole place was in bustle and confusion. Many of the girls were packing their trunks preparatory to the great exodus which would take place the day after to-morrow. Evelyn and her favorite friends were sitting in the large summerhouse which faced the front of the house. They were chatting and

laughing merrily, and seeing Biddy they called to her to come and join them. Her impulse was to rush to them, and pour out some of her troubles in Dolly's kind ears; but then she remembered certain sarcastic sayings of Janet's. Janet's many insinuations were taking effect on her.

"They all look good enough up in that summer-house," she said to herself; "but according to Janet they are each of them shams. Oh, dear, dear, what a horrid place the world is! I don't think there's any-one at all nice in it, except father and the dogs, and Pat and Norah. Aunt Kathie is pretty well, but even she is taken in by Janet. I don't think school is doing me any good; I hate it more and more every day. I shan't join the girls in the summerhouse; I'll go away and sit by myself."

She turned down a shady walk, and presently seating herself under a large tree, and, clasping her hands round her knees, she began to think with pleasure of the fast approaching holidays.

While Bridget was so occupied, two ladies passed at a little distance arm in arm. They were Miss Delicia and the English mistress, Miss Dent. These two were always good friends; they were both kind-hearted, and inclined to indulge the girls. They were great favorites, and were supposed to be very easily influenced.

When she saw them approach, Bridget glanced lazily round. They did not notice her, but made straight for the little rustic bower close to the tree under which she was sitting.

"I can't account for it," said Miss Dent. "Of course, I have always found plenty of faults in Bridget

O'Hara, but I never did think that she would stoop to dishonor."

Bridget locked her hands tightly together; a great wave of angry color mounted to her temples. Her first impulse was to spring to her feet, to disclose herself to the two ladies, and angrily demand the meaning of their words. Then a memory of something Violet had said came over her; she sat very still; she was determined to listen.

"I think you must be mistaken, Sarah," said Miss Delicia to her friend. "I know my sister, Mrs. Freeman, thinks that Bridget, with all her faults, has a fine character. I heard her saying so to Patience one day. Patience, poor dear, just lacks the very thing she was called after, and Henrietta said to her: 'The material is raw, but it is capable of being fashioned into something noble.' I must say I agreed with Henrietta."

"My dear Delicia," responded the other lady, "am I unjust, suspicious, or wanting in charity?"

"No, Sarah; Patience—poor Patience—does fail in those respects occasionally; but no one can lay these sins to your door."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Now you must listen to the following facts. You know what a queer medley that poor girl's mind is in; she has a good deal of knowledge of a certain kind: she has poetic fancy, and brilliant imagination, she has a lovely singing voice, and the expression she throws into her music almost amounts to genius; nevertheless, where ordinary school work is concerned, the girl is an absolute ignoramus. Her knowledge of geography is a blank. Kamschatka may be within a mile of London, for all she knows to the contrary, Africa may be found at the opposite side

of the Straits of Dover; her spelling is too atrocious for words. As to arithmetic, she is a perfect goose whenever she tries to conquer the smallest and simplest sum."

"Well, my dear," interrupted Miss Delicia, "granted all this, the poor child has been sent to school to be taught, I suppose. I can't see why she should be accused of dishonor because she is ignorant."

"My dear friend, you must allow me to continue. I am coming to my point immediately. When Bridget first came to school, she was placed in the lowest class in the middle school. She was with girls a couple of years her juniors. Mrs. Freeman was much distressed at this arrangement, for Bridget is not only fifteen—she arrived at that age since she came to school—but she is a remarkably developed, grown-up-looking girl for her years; to have to do lessons, therefore, with little girls of twelve and thirteen was in every way bad for her.

"There was no help for it, however, and we had really to strain a point to keep her out of the lower school.

"For two or three weeks Biddy did as badly as any girl with a reasonable amount of brains could. Each day we felt that we must take her out of the middle school. Then occurred that unfortunate accident, when Evelyn Percival was so nearly hurt. That seemed to bring things to a crisis. Bridget was punished, you remember?"

"Yes," said Miss Delicia, nodding her wise head, "I remember perfectly."

"Bridget was punished," continued Miss Dent, "but on that day also she submitted to authority. The

next morning she took her usual place in class, but—lo and behold! there was a marked and sudden improvement. Her spelling was correct, the different places in the world began to assume their relative positions. Her sums were more than good. In two or three days she had risen to the head of her class; she was moved into a higher one, and took a high place in that also. This state of things continued for a fortnight; we were all in delight, for the girl had plenty about her to win our interest. All she wanted to make her one of the most popular girls in the school was attention to the rules, and a certain power of getting on at her lessons.

"This golden fortnight in Biddy's life, however, came to an end. Her aunt, Lady Kathleen Peterham, called a week ago, and took her and Janet May to Eastcliff. On that very morning Bridget had absolutely no lessons to say; she had not written out her theme, she had not learned her geography; her sum book was a blank. From that day she has returned to her normal state of ignorance; her lessons are as hopelessly badly learnt as ever."

"Well, well," said Miss Delicia, "I am sorry for the poor child. That rather silly aunt of hers probably turned her brain, but I cannot even now see how you make her conduct dishonorable. She's a naughty child, of course, and we must spur her on to greater efforts next time; but as to her being wanting in *honor*, that's a strong word, Sarah."

"Wait a minute," said Miss Dent. "You know the girls have to give up all their exercise books a couple of days before the examinations? Bridget handed me hers a couple of days ago. Her books

were disgraceful—blotty, untidy, almost illegible. I examined them in hopeless despair. Suddenly my eyes were arrested; I was looking through the English themes.

"'Ah!' I said, 'here is the little oasis in the desert; these are the exercises Biddy wrote during the fortnight she was so good.'

"I suppose it was the force of the contrast, but I looked at these neatly written, absolutely correct, well spelled pages in astonishment. Busy as I was, I felt obliged to read one of the little essays over again; the subject was 'Julius Cæsar.' Bridget went up to the top of her class for the masterly way in which she had worked out her little essay. I read it over again, in perplexity and admiration. The English was correct, the style vigorous; there were both conciseness and thought in the well turned sentences. One phrase, however, struck on my ear with a curious sense of familiarity. At first I said to myself, 'I remarked this sentence when Bridget read her theme aloud, that is the reason why it is so familiar,' but my mind was not satisfied with this explanation. Like a flash I remembered where I had seen it before. I said to myself the child has got this out of Pearson's book of English extracts. Her essay is admirable, even without this concluding thought. I must tell her to put marks of quotation another time when she uses phrases not her own. I rose and went to the bookcase, and taking down Pearson, looked out his remarks on Julius Cæsar. My dear Delicia, judge of my feelings; the little essay was copied word for word from Pearson's book! It was a daring act, and, putting the wickedness out of sight, almost a silly one, for to quote from such a well-

known author as Pearson was naturally almost to invite discovery. All the good, carefully written essays were copied from the same volume. I can at last understand why Bridget has fallen back into her old state of hopeless ignorance. I can also, alas! understand that golden fortnight of promise."

"But this is dreadful!" said Miss Delicia. "What have you done; have you told my sister yet?"

"No, I wanted to consult you before I spoke to anyone else on the matter."

Bridget got up slowly and softly, and moved away down the shady path; the two ladies did not see her as she went. She soon found herself standing on the open lawn in front of the house. The great marquee was being put up there; several workmen were busy, and little girls were fluttering about like gay, happy butterflies. Alice, Violet, and two or three more ran up to her when they saw her. "We are making wreaths of evergreens; won't you help us, Bridget?" they exclaimed.

"No," she said; "I have a headache—don't worry me." She turned abruptly away and walked down the avenue.

She had no longer any wish to break the rules, but she thought she would wait about near the entrance gates, in order to catch Janet on her way back from Eastcliff.

The girls were all busy round the marquee, and Bridget had this part of the avenue to herself; she went and stood near an ivy-covered wall; leaned her elbows against the trunk of a tree, and waited; a motionless, but pretty figure, her gay ribbons streaming about her, her hat pushed back from her

forehead, her puzzled, troubled eyes looking on the ground.

Bridget knew that Janet would be back within an hour. It mattered very little to her how long she had to wait; she felt too stunned and sore to be troubled by any keen sense of impatience.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I'M BIG—AND I'M DESPERATE."

As soon as Janet found herself alone in the pony trap, she took a letter out of her pocket, opened it, and read its contents with eagerness. These were the words on which her eyes fell:

MY DEAR, GOOD LITTLE JANEY:

I am afraid I cannot take your advice; I cannot exercise the virtue of patience another day. Mine has run its course, my dear, and the whole stock is exhausted. I have resolved to leave my situation on Saturday. I have given Miss Simpkins notice—she does not believe me, of course, but she'll know who's right when Saturday comes, and she has no one to hector and bully and make life a misery to. I wonder where you are going to spend your holidays. Don't go to Aunt Jane's, I beg of you; I know she has sent you an invitation, but don't accept it. Now, couldn't you and I go off for a little jaunt together to Margate, and have some fun? And look here, dear, *will* you send me two pounds by return of post? I absolutely must have the money, for Miss Simpkins paid me in full a week ago, and I shan't have a penny when I leave, as of course, the little I get from her—she is the stingiest old wretch in existence!—naturally goes to keep your humble servant in dress, stamps, paper, etc., etc. Lend me two pounds, like a darling. I'll pay it back when I can. I do not want to go to Aunt Jane's, and I will have to do it if you cannot oblige me, Janey; but if you can I will go to Margate and take a bedroom there, which you can share, my love, and we'll have some fun, if it's only for a couple of days.

Your loving sister,

SOPHIA.

"Poor Sophy," exclaimed Janet. She folded up the letter and placed it in her pocket. "I wonder where she thinks I'm going to get two pounds from?" she muttered. "I am as hard up as a girl can be. Sophy might have stayed with Miss Simpkins, but she's a sort of bad penny; always returning on one's hands when one least expects her. Well, I don't see how I'm going to help her. It would be very nice to go to Margate with her, but what would Mrs. Freeman say? No, I think I know a better plan than that. I am not going to Aunt Jane's for the holidays; I am going to have a good time, but it won't be at Margate. Suppose Sophy came, too? she's very pretty, and very clever, and I think Lady Kathleen would like her awfully. I must think over this. Oh, here we are at Eastcliff. Now, my dear little Biddy, the first thing to be done is post your letter, but if you think I am going to get that postal order, and place it in it, you are vastly mistaken. I do not at all know that I shall send the two sovereigns to Sophy, but it is convenient to have them at hand in case of need."

Janet was always very cool and methodical in her movements. She never, as the phrase goes, "lost her head." She could also make up her mind clearly and decidedly. Having done so, she now proceeded to act. She slipped her sister's most troublesome letter into her pocket, and driving to the pastry cook's, ordered the creams, jellies, and other refreshments necessary for the next day's entertainment. She then went to the post office and wrote a few lines.

MY DEAR SOPHY [she wrote]: How am I to get two pounds? You must be mad to think that I can send you so large a sum of money. If Aunt Jane pays for my schooling, she takes very good

care to stint my pocket money. You had better be wise and go straight to her when you leave Miss Simpkins. I *may* have a nice plan to propose in a day or two, but am not sure. You may be certain I'll do my best for you, only do be patient.

Your affectionate sister,

JANET MAY.

This letter was sealed and directed, and in company with Bridget's found its way into one of Her Majesty's mail bags; then Janet stepped once again into the pony carriage, and desired the coachman to drive her back to Mulberry Court.

The two sovereigns were snugly placed in her purse. She had not yet quite made up her mind to steal them, but she liked even the temporary sense of wealth and possession that they gave her.

The wickedness of her own act did not trouble her hardened conscience; she sat lazily back in the snug little carriage, and enjoyed the pleasant feel of the summer breeze against her forehead. A passing sense of annoyance swept over her as she thought of Sophy. Sophy was nineteen; a very pretty, empty-headed girl. She had not half Janet's abilities. She was really affectionate, but weak, and most easily led. Janet was three years younger than her sister, but in force of character she was several years her senior. The two girls were orphans. They had lived a scrambling sort of life; tossed about when they were little children, from one uncomfortable home to another. Finally, at the ages of fourteen and eleven, they found themselves with a very strict and puritanical old aunt. Her influence was bad for both of them, particularly for Janet. Old Aunt Jane was a very good and excellent woman, but she did not understand the two badly trained and badly dis-

ciplined girls. She was by no means rich, but she struggled to educate them. Sophy was not clever enough to undertake the somewhat arduous duties required from governesses in the present day, but Miss Laughton took great pains to get her a post as companion. Janet had plenty of abilities, and she was sent to Mulberry Court to be trained as a teacher.

The girls were fond of each other. Perhaps the only person in the wide world whom Janet really loved was this frivolous and thoughtless sister. She ruled Sophy, and, when with her, made her do exactly what she wished; but still, after a fashion, she felt a very genuine affection for her.

"Sophy might have stayed at Miss Simpkins's," muttered Janet, as she drove back to the Court; "but as she has given notice, there's no help for it. I must get Lady Kathleen to invite her to Ireland when I go. I'm determined to manage that little affair for myself, and Sophy may as well join in the fun."

The carriage turned in at the white gates of Mulberry Court, and Bridget sprang forward to meet it.

"Get out, Janet!" she said, in an imperious, excited voice; "get out at once; I have something to say to you."

"Stop, Jones," called Janet to the driver. "If you want to speak to me, Bridget, you had better jump into the carriage, for I mean to go back to the house; I want to speak to Mrs. Freeman."

"You won't do anything of the kind," said Bridget; "you have got to speak to me first; if you don't, I'll go straight to Miss Delicia and Miss Dent and tell them everything. I know now about Pearson's extracts, and

I'll tell about them; yes, I will; I won't live under this disgrace! You had better jump out at once, and let me speak to you, or I'll tell."

Bridget's eyes were flashing with anger, and her cheeks blazing with excitement.

In this mood she was not to be trifled with.

Janet could not comprehend all her wild words, but she guessed enough to feel an instant sense of alarm. There was danger ahead, and danger always rendered Janet May cool and collected.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "why do you speak in such a loud, excited voice? Of course, I'll go and talk to you if you really want me. Jones, please take this basket carefully to the house, and if you see Mrs. Freeman tell her that I shall be with her in a few minutes, and that everything is arranged quite satisfactorily for to-morrow. Don't forget my message, Jones."

"No, miss; I'll be careful to remember." The man touched his hat. Janet alighted from the pony trap, and, taking Bridget's hand, walked up the avenue with her.

"Now, you dear little Quicksilver," she exclaimed, "what is the matter? I posted your letter, my love, so that weight is off your mind."

"Thank you, Janet," exclaimed poor Bridget; "you did not forget to put the postal order in, did you?"

Janet raised her delicate brows in well-acted astonishment.

"Is that likely?" she exclaimed. "But now, why this excitement? Have you heard fresh news of that valuable Pat, and that delightful Norah?"

"Janet, you are not to talk of the people I love in

that tone; I won't have it! I quite hate you when you go on like this. I'm not mean, but I know what you are wanting, and I shall speak to Aunt Kathleen and ask her not to invite you to Ireland if you go on in this way. Aunt Kathleen likes you because she does not know you, but I can soon open her eyes."

Janet put on a mock tone of alarm.

"You must not crush me, my dear," she exclaimed; "it *would* be a trial not to go to the Castle. There, there, I don't want really to tease you, my love. Now, what is the matter? Why have you been making those extraordinary remarks about Pearson? Who *is* Pearson?"

"You know better than I do, Janet. I'll tell you what has happened. You copied a lot of themes, and gave them to me as if they were your own to put into my exercise book. It was very, very wrong of me to let you help me at all, but, of course, I thought that you had done so without referring to books."

"My dear little saint! I don't see what difference that makes!"

"I don't suppose it makes any difference in the wickedness," retorted Bridget; "but it certainly does in the chance of being found out. I overheard Miss Dent and Miss Delicia talking in one of the summerhouses; Miss Dent has discovered that my essays were copied from Pearson's extracts, and she's awfully angry, and Miss Delicia is horrified. I won't live under it! no, I won't! I was awfully wicked ever to allow it, but I'd much, much rather confess everything now. I am an idle, scapegrace sort of a girl; but I can't think how I ever submitted to your making me dishonorable. I'm

horribly dishonorable, and I could die of the shame of it! I'll go straight this very minute to Mrs. Freeman, and tell her to punish me as much as ever she likes. The only thing I shall beg of her is not to tell father, for this is a sort of thing that would break my father's heart. You must come with me, of course, Janet; you must come at once and explain your share in the matter. That's what I waited for you here for. It is most important that everything should be told without a minute's delay."

Bridget's words were poured out with such intense passion and anguish that Janet was impressed in spite of herself. She was not only impressed; she was frightened. It took a great deal to arouse the sense of alarm in her calm breast, but she did realize now that she had got herself and the young Irish girl into a considerable scrape, and that, if she did not wish to have all her own projects destroyed, it behooved her to be extremely wary.

"Let us go down and walk by the sea, Biddy," she said. "Oh, yes, there's plenty of time; meals will be quite irregular to-day. Why, how you tremble, you poor little creature!"

"I'm not little," said Bridget; "I'm big, and I'm desperate. The time has gone by for you to come round me with soft words, Janet. Why am I to go and walk with you by the sea? The thing to be done is for us both to find Mrs. Freeman, and tell her, without mincing words, how wicked we are."

"Have you really made up your mind to do this?" said Janet.

She turned and faced her companion. The color had left her cheeks, her lips trembled, her eyes were dilated.

"Do you positively mean to do this cruel thing?" she repeated.

"Cruel?" said Bridget, stamping her foot; "it's the only bit of justice left; it's the one last chance of our ever retrieving our position. Oh, do come with me at once; there's just time for us to see Mrs. Freeman before tea."

"You can go, Bridget," said Janet. "If you are determined to go I cannot prevent you. You can make all this terrible mischief if you like; but you must do it alone, for I shall not be with you. The effect of your confession will be this: you will suffer some sort of punishment, and by and by you will be forgiven; and by and by, too, you will forget what you now consider such an awful tragedy; but what you are now doing will ruin me for all my life. I am only sixteen—but no matter. However long I live I shall never be able to get over this step that you are taking. If you go—as you say you will—to Mrs. Freeman, there is only one thing for me to do, and that is to run away from school. I won't remain here to be expelled; for expelled I shall be if you tell what you say you will of me. They'll make out that I am worse than you, and they'll expel me. You don't know the effect that such a disgrace will have on my future. I am not rich like you; I have no father to break his heart about me. The only relations I have left in the world are an old aunt, who is very stingy and very hard-hearted, and who would never forgive me if I did the smallest thing to incur her displeasure; and one sister, who is three years older than myself, and who is very pretty and very silly, and who has written to me to say she has lost her situation as companion. If you do what you are going to do,

Bridget, I shall walk back to Eastcliff, and take the next train to Bristol, where Aunt Jane lives. You will ruin me, of course; but I don't suppose that fact will influence your decision. I did what I did for you out of a spirit of pure kindliness; but that, too, will be forgotten, now that your conscience has awakened. I am just waiting for you to choose what you will really do, Bridget, before I run away."

When Janet finished speaking she moved a few steps from her companion. She saw that her words had taken effect, for Biddy's determined expression had changed to one of indecision and fresh misery; her troubled eyes sought the ground, her red lips trembled.

"I see you have made up your mind," said Janet. (She saw quite the reverse, but she thought these words a politic stroke.) "I see you have quite made up your mind," she continued; "so there is nothing for me to do but to go. Good-by! I only wish I had never been so unlucky as to know you."

Janet turned on her heel, and began to walk down the avenue.

"You know you can't go like this," Bridget called after her. "Stop! Listen to me! You know perfectly well that, bad as you are, I don't want to ruin you. I'll go by myself, then, and say nothing about you. Will that content you?"

"I see you are going to be reasonable," said Janet, returning, and taking her companion's arm. "Now we can talk the matter out. Come down this shady walk, where no one will see us. Of course, the whole thing is most disagreeable and unpleasant, but surely two wise heads like ours can see a way even out of this difficulty."

"But there is no way, Janet, except by just confessing that we have behaved very badly. Come along, and let us do it at once. I don't believe you'll get into the awful scrape you make out. I won't let you! I'll take your part, and be your friend. You shall come to Ireland with Aunt Kathleen and me, and father will be ever so kind to you, and perhaps—I'm not sure—but *perhaps* I'll be able to give you one of the dogs."

"Thanks!" said Janet, slightly turning her head away; "but even the hope of ultimately possessing one of those valuable quadrupeds cannot lighten the gloom of my present position. There is no help for it, Biddy, we must stick to one another, and resolve, whatever happens, *not* to tell."

"But they know already," said Bridget. "Miss Delicia and Miss Dent know already! Did I not tell you that I overheard them talking about it?"

"Yes, my dear, you did. It is really most perplexing. You must let me think for a moment what is best to be done."

Janet stood still in the center of the path; Bridget looked at her anxiously.

"What a fool I was," she murmured under her breath, "to use that extract book. It was just my laziness; and how could I suppose that that stupid Miss Dent would go and pry into it? It will be a mercy if she does not discover where some of my own happy ideas have come from. If I trusted to my own brains I could have concocted something quite good enough to raise poor little Biddy in her class. Discovery would then have been impossible. Oh, what a sin laziness is!"

"What are we to do?" said Bridget, looking anx-

iously at her companion. "We have very little time to make up our minds in, for probably before now Miss Dent and Miss Delicia have told Mrs. Freeman. I do want, at least, to have the small merit of having told my own sin before it has been announced by another. There's no way out of it, Janet. Come and let us tell at once!"

"How aggravating you are!" replied Janet. "There is a way out of it. You must give me until after tea to think what is best to be done. Ah! there's the gong! We *can't* tell now until after tea, even if we wished to. Come along, Bridget, let us return to the house. I'll meet you in the South Walk at seven o'clock, and then I shall have something tangible to propose."

Bridget was obliged very unwillingly to consent to this delay. Hers was a nature always prone to extremes. She thought badly of her conduct in allowing Janet to help her with her lessons ever since the moment little Violet had given back the waxen doll, but even then she did not know the half of the sin which she and another had committed. It only needed Miss Dent and Miss Delicia to open her eyes. A sick sense of abasement was over her. Her proud spirit felt humbled to the very dust. She was so low about herself that she looked forward to confession with almost relief.

Janet's nature, however, was a great deal firmer and more resolute than Bridget's. There was no help for it: the Irish girl was bound to comply with her decision. The two walked slowly up to the house, where they parted, Janet running up to her room to take off her hat, wash her hands, and smooth her hair, and Biddy, tossing her shady hat off in the hall, and entering

the tea room looking messed and untidy. On another day she would have been reprimanded for this, but the excitement which preceded the grand break-up prevented anyone noticing her. She sank down in the first vacant seat, and listlessly stirred the tea which she felt unable to drink.

Janet's conduct in this emergency differed in all respects from Bridget's. No girl could look fresher, sweeter, or more composed than she when, a moment or two later, she entered the long room. Mrs. Freeman was pouring out tea at the head of the table. Janet went straight up to her, and entered into a lucid explanation of what she had done at Eastcliff, and the purchases she had made.

"Very nice, my dear! Yes, quite satisfactory. Ah! very thoughtful of you, Janet Sit down now, dear, and take your tea."

Janet found a place near Dolly. She ate heartily, and was sufficiently roused out of herself to be almost merry.

When the girls were leaving the tea room, Janet lingered a little behind the others. Her eyes anxiously followed Miss Delicia, who, with a flushed face and dubious, uncertain manner, was watching her elder sister, Mrs. Freeman. Miss Dent had not appeared at all at tea, which Janet regarded as a very bad sign, but she also felt sure, by the head mistress's calm expression, that the news of Bridget's delinquencies had not been revealed to her. Janet saw, however, by Miss Delicia's manner that this would not long be the case. Janet had thought the matter over carefully, and had made up her mind to a determined and bold stroke.

Miss Delicia, who had, as usual, been hopping about

during the meal, attending to everyone's comforts, and quite forgetting her own, was now seen by Janet to walk up by the side of the long table, evidently with the intention of waylaying Mrs. Freeman as she left the room.

With a sudden movement Janet frustrated her intentions. Mrs. Freeman passed out through the upper door of the tea room, and Miss Delicia found herself coming plump up against Janet May.

"Oh, I want to speak to you!" said Janet.

"Pardon me," said Miss Delicia, "I will attend to you in a moment; but, first of all, I wish to say a word to my sister; she will shut herself up in her own room, for she is going to be very busy over accounts, if I don't immediately secure her. I'll be back with you in a moment, Janet, after I have spoken to Mrs. Freeman."

"Please forgive me," said Janet, "but what I have to say is of very great importance. Perhaps you won't want to speak to Mrs. Freeman after you have talked to me."

"Now, my dear, what do you mean?"

Miss Delicia raised her kind, but somewhat nervous eyes. She was a little round body, nearly a head shorter than tall Janet May.

"I want to speak to you by yourself," said Janet; "it is of great importance—the very greatest. Please talk to me before you say anything to Mrs. Freeman."

"Come to my private room," said Miss Delicia, taking Janet's hand in her own. "Come quickly before Patience sees us. Miss Patience is very curious; she will wonder what is up. Ah, here we are with the door shut; that is a comfort. Now, my dear, begin. Your manner quite frightens me."

"I have something most important to say. I am very glad—very, very glad—that it is to you, Miss Delicia, that I have got to say this thing. Your kindness is—is well known. Each girl in the school is well aware of the fact that you would not willingly hurt anyone."

"My dear, none of us would do that, I hope." Miss Delicia drew her little figure up. "We are Pickerings; my sister, Mrs. Freeman, is a Pickering by birth; and the Pickerings have been in the scholastic line from time immemorial. Those who guide the young ought always to be tolerant, always kind, always forbearing."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Janet, "I know that, of course, but some people are more forbearing than others. Mrs. Freeman, Miss Patience, and you are loved and respected by us all; but you are loved the most, for you are the kindest."

Miss Delicia's little face flushed all over.

"I am gratified, of course," she said, "but *if* this is the general feeling, I shall be most careful to keep the knowledge from my sisters Henrietta and Patience. Now, Janet, what is it you want to say to me?"

"I want to speak to you about Bridget O'Hara."

Miss Delicia felt the color receding from her cheeks.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "what about her? I may as well say at once that I am not happy with regard to that young girl."

"I know," said Janet, "I—I know more than you think; that is what I want to speak about. Biddy has told me; poor Biddy, poor, poor misguided Biddy."

"Bridget O'Hara has told you? Told you what, Janet? It is your duty to speak; what has she told you?"

"The truth, poor girl," said Janet, shaking her head

mournfully. "I'll tell you everything, Miss Delicia. Biddy, through an accident, overheard you and Miss Dent speak about her this afternoon."

"Then she's an eavesdropper as well as everything else," said Miss Delicia. "Oh, this is too bad. I did not suppose that such an absolutely unprincipled, wicked girl ever existed; with her beautiful face too, and her kind, charming, open manners. Oh, she's a wolf in sheep's clothing, she will be the undoing of the entire school. It is very difficult, Janet, to rouse my anger, but when it is aroused I—I—well, I feel things *extremely*, my dear. I must go to Mrs. Freeman at once; don't keep me, I beg."

Janet placed herself between Miss Delicia and the door.

"I must keep you," she said. "You are not often angry, Miss Delicia; I want you on this occasion to be very forbearing, and to restrain your indignation until you have at least listened to me. Biddy did not mean to eavesdrop."

"Oh, don't talk to me, my dear!"

"I must, I will talk to you. Please, please let me say my say. Biddy behaved badly, disgracefully, but she did not mean to listen. She was in trouble, poor girl, about a friend of hers, a servant who was ill in Ireland. She was sitting in the shrubbery thinking about it all when you and Miss Dent came and sat in the summer-house near by. You spoke her name, and said some very plain truths about her. She forgot all about going away and everything else in the intense interest with which she followed your words. She rushed away at last, and waited near the gates in the avenue to unburden herself to me. Whatever you may have said to

Miss Dent, Miss Delicia, the effect on Bridget was really heartrending; she told me that you had opened her eyes, that she saw at last the disgrace of her own conduct. I never could have believed that the poor girl could get into such a state of mind; I really felt quite anxious about her. I don't think my sympathies were ever more thoroughly aroused, and you know that I am not easily carried away by my feelings."

"That is certainly the character you have received in the school, Janet May."

"It is true," repeated Janet, in her steady voice; "I am not demonstrative. Therefore, when I am roused to pity, the case which arouses me must be supposed to be extreme. Poor Biddy is in the most terrible anguish."

"Did she tell you, did she dare to tell you, that she copied her extracts from Pearson?"

"She did, she told me everything. She says she is quite sure that Mrs. Freeman will expel her, and that, if so, her father will die of grief."

"Oh, she has deputed you, then, to plead for her?"

"She has not; it has never occurred to her that anyone should plead for her. She does not feel even a vestige of hope in the matter; but I do plead for her, Miss Delicia. I ask you to have mercy upon her."

"Mercy," said Miss Delicia, "mercy! Is this sort of thing to go on in a respectable high-class school? We are not going to be heartlessly cruel to any girl, of course, but my sisters Henrietta and Patience must decide what is really to be done."

"I have come to you with a bold request," said Janet. "I will state it at once frankly. I want you

not to consult your sisters about Bridget until—until after the festival to-morrow."

"I can't grant your request, my dear."

"But please consider. I am taking great and personal interest in Bridget; you know that I am very steady."

"You are, Janet; you are one of the best girls in the school."

"Thank you," said Janet, "I try to do my duty; I take a great interest in Bridget, and I have an influence over her. You know how badly she has been brought up; you know how reckless she is, how untaught, how affectionate and generous she can be, and yet also how desperate and defiant. There are only two people in the world whom she greatly loves; her old father is one; oh, she has told me lovely, pathetic stories about her gray-headed old father; and her aunt, Lady Kathleen Peterham, is the other. To-morrow is to be a great day in the school, and if Bridget is to be in disgrace and publicly held up to opprobrium, you can imagine what Lady Kathleen's feelings will be—what Bridget's own feelings will be. What will be the effect? Bridget will be taken away from school and in all probability never educated at all."

"But, my dear—you are a remarkably wise girl, Janet—my dear, the fact of my sisters knowing the truth about Bridget O'Hara need not be followed by public and open disgrace. We three must consult over the matter and decide what are the best steps to take."

"Forgive me," said Janet, "you know—you must know what Mrs. Freeman's and Miss Patience's sentiments will be. If you, who are so gentle and charitable, feel intense anger, what will their anger be? Reflect, Miss Delicia, you must reflect on the plain fact

that they will feel it their duty publicly to disgrace Bridget."

"For the sake of example," murmured Miss Delicia.

"Precisely," said Janet, "for the sake of example; and Biddy's character will be ruined forever. Lady Kathleen will take her from school, and all chance of making her what she may become, a brave and noble woman, will be at an end."

"If I thought that——" said Miss Delicia.

"It is true. I assure you, it is true!"

"What do you want me to do then, Janet?"

"Simply to keep your knowledge to yourself for twenty-four hours."

"I am much puzzled," murmured Miss Delicia. "You're a queer girl, Janet May, but I will own there is wisdom in your words."

"How sweet you are, Miss Delicia! You will never, never repent of this forbearance."

"But there is Miss Dent to be thought of, my love. She is most unhappy about the whole thing."

"You will talk to her," said Janet; "you will talk to her as if from yourself; you will, of course, not mention me, for who am I? nothing but a schoolgirl. You will tell Miss Dent that you have thought it wisest to defer saying anything to Mrs. Freeman until the anxieties of to-morrow are over. Oh, it does seem only right and natural; I am so deeply obliged to you. May I kiss you? This lesson in Christian forbearance will, I assure you, not be thrown away on me, and will, doubtless, be the saving of poor, poor Biddy."

Janet ran out of the room; Miss Delicia pressed her hand in a confused way to her forehead.

"Have I really promised not to tell?" she murmured;

"I suppose so, although I don't remember saying the words. What a queer, clever girl that is, and yet, at the same time, how really kind. It is noble of her to plead like that for Bridget! Well, after all, twenty-four hours can't greatly signify, and the delay will certainly insure Henrietta and Patience a peaceful time. Now, I must go and talk to poor, dear Sarah Dent."

CHAPTER XV.

BRIDGET O'HARA'S STALL.

"AND now, my dears," said Mrs. Freeman, addressing her assembled school, "we have come to the end of our school term; the prizes have been distributed; the examinations are over. To those girls who have succeeded in winning prizes, and who have, in consequence, been raised to higher classes in the school, I offer my most hearty congratulations; they have worked well and steadily, and they now reap their due rewards. You, my dears"—the head mistress waved her hand in the direction of the successful girls who were each of them pinning a white satin badge into their dresses, and were standing together in a little group—"you, my dears, will wear the badge of honor all through the remainder of this day; may honor dwell in your hearts, and may success attend you through life; that success, my dear girls, which comes from earnest living, from constant endeavor to pursue the right, from constant determination to forsake the wrong. You have been successful in this day's examinations; you have every reason to be pleased with your success; but, at the same time, it must not render you self-confident. In short, my dear girls, you must ask for strength other than your own to carry you safely though the waves of this troublesome world. I now want to say a word or two to those girls who have

not to-day earned prizes. I want you, my dear children, not to go away with any undue sense of discouragement. If, through carelessness or inattention, you have not got the prize you coveted, you must try very hard to be careful and attentive next term; you must also, however, remember that every girl cannot win a prize, but that patience and constant endeavor will secure to each of you the best rewards in due time. On the whole, the term's work has been satisfactory, and the progress made in every branch of study gratifying. I now declare the school closed as far as lessons are concerned. Some of you will go away to your own homes to-night; some to-morrow morning. We shall all meet again, I hope, in September; and now there is a very happy time before us. To the courage and the thoughtfulness of a young girl in this school whom you all know—I allude to Janet May—we are going to have a Fancy Fair for the benefit of a child who has none of the advantages which you one and all possess. Evelyn Percival, as the head girl of the school, and as my special friend and right hand, will hold the first stall at the Fancy Fair; this, of course, is her due—but, that every justice should be done, I wish you all, girls, now to acknowledge that the first thought of the fair was due to Janet. Shall we cheer her?"

A chorus of applause followed the head mistress's speech. Janet, in her white dress with green ribbons, the glistening satin badge of a prize-winner pinned on her breast, stood pale and slender, a little in advance of the other girls who had also won prizes. A brief gleam of triumph filled her dark, steel-blue eyes; she glanced at Evelyn, who, next to her, occupied the most conspicuous position; her breath came fast; her lips

trembled. The burst of applause was delicious to her.

The girls were all clapping and stamping vigorously. Their "hip, hip, hurrrah!" echoed through the large hall where the examinations had just been held.

Raising her eyes suddenly, Janet perceived that Bridget O'Hara stood motionless. She was in front of a group of smaller girls; her lips were shut; neither hands nor feet responded to the volume of applause which was echoing on all sides for Janet May.

"Now we'll cheer our head girl," said Mrs. Freeman. "We are thankful for her restoration to health, and we wish her long to remain an inmate of Mulberry Court. Now, girls, with all your might, three cheers for Evelyn Percival, the school favorite!"

The burst of applause was deafening; the old roof rang with the exultant young voices. Evelyn, in her turn, proposed some cheers for the head mistress and the other teachers, after which the school broke up.

"Why didn't you cheer Janet May, Biddy?" asked Violet, when the girls were streaming out of the hall. "I noticed that you didn't say a word, and that you neither clapped your hands nor stamped your feet. I was surprised, for I thought you were so fond of her."

"I'm not fond of her at all," said Bridget. "Don't bother me, Vi; I must run down now to the marquee to see about my stall."

Violet's little face looked mystified. She turned to say something to her chum Alice, and Bridget ran down the lawn to the marquee.

The school was broken up by twelve o'clock, but the Fancy Fair was not to be opened until three.

Evelyn Percival's stall had been fully dressed the

night before. It looked very lovely and inviting, and although Janet's and Bridget's stall also looked pretty, the stall of the head girl took the shine out of all the others.

When Bridget found herself standing by the marquee she looked around, to find no one present but Janet.

"I suppose you are satisfied now?" she said, giving Miss May a slightly contemptuous glance. "You had your desire; you were publicly honored and clapped by the whole school."

"Well, my dear love," retorted Janet, who was most anxious to be friendly with Bridget, "don't be vicious about it. I noticed that you didn't clap me, nor cheer me. Why was that, *chérie?* Your conduct didn't look at all amiable."

"I was to clap you for being good and honorable. As I happen to know you are not at all good, and most frightfully dishonorable, it was impossible for me to join in the applause."

"Oh, now, my dear Bridget, if you are going to preach!"

"I to preach? Certainly not! I need someone to preach *me* sermons. When are we to see Mrs. Freeman?"

"I told you not before this evening. Why will you worry me with that unpleasant subject? We have enough on our hands now in getting the fair well through."

"I wish it were over; I hate the Fancy Fair! I saw Miss Delicia looking at me, and Miss Dent's eyes were so red, while Mrs. Freeman was talking of the goodness of her girls. I never felt smaller nor meaner in my life. If Mrs. Freeman had known everything, you would not have been standing where you were, Janet,

with all that false glory shining about you. I couldn't have taken it, if it were me; but you didn't seem to mind."

"Mind, dear? I like it, I assure you! I mean to have some more of that sort of glory before the day is out. Ah, and here they come! I knew they would not fail us."

Janet's eyes glistened with delight; she forgot all Biddy's unpleasant words in the ecstasy of this moment. Two men were seen walking across the lawn, each of them bearing a large hamper. They laid them down on the grass beside Janet and Bridget.

"These are from Lady Kathleen Peterham," the foremost of the men said. "She desired that they should be delivered without delay to Miss Bridget O'Hara and Miss Janet May."

"This is Bridget O'Hara, and I am Janet May," exclaimed Janet.

The man touched his hat.

"That's all right, then, miss. There are four more hampers to be brought along; we has 'em in a cart at the gate. My mate and me'll go back and fetch 'em, miss; and Lady Kathleen said that one of us was to stay and help you to open them."

"Yes, yes," said Janet eagerly. "Bring the hampers round, please, to the back part of the marquee. We shall have the place quite to ourselves, for the girls do not think there is anything more to be done, and they are busy finishing their packing. Now, Biddy, Biddy, help me! let us set to work. Oh, Glory and Honor, we shall have something more to do with *you* this day!"

Janet's delicate complexion began to flame with excitement; her hand shook with eagerness. She fastened

a large brown holland apron over her pretty white dress, and with the aid of one of the men, who was very handy and efficient, began to take out the contents of the hampers.

Bridget stood aside without offering to help. Janet gave her one or two indignant glances, and then resolved to waste no further time on her.

The lovely things which Lady Kathleen had purchased in Paris were so varied and so dazzling that the home-painted fans, and the various home articles of beauty and art were pushed hastily out of sight, and the stall practically redecked.

Lady Kathleen had evidently spared neither time nor money. Her magnificent contribution to the Fancy Fair consisted of necklets, bangles, scarfs, handkerchiefs, aprons, ties, every conceivable house ornament, gay butterflies for the hair, bewitching little Parisian bonnets; in short, a medley of fashion and beauty which intoxicated Janet out of all reason. She clapped her hands, and laughed aloud, and even Bridget so far forgot her sorrows and the gloom and disgrace which each moment was bringing nearer, to exclaim at the treasures which were taken out of the wonderful hampers.

Evelyn's really beautiful stall sank into complete insignificance beside the stall which was decked with the rare articles of beauty from the choicest Parisian shops. Evelyn might be head of the fair, but Lady Kathleen would certainly have her wish, for no one with eyes to see, and money in her pocket, would linger for a moment beside the home-decked stall when the sort of fairyland which Bridget's and Janet's stall now presented was waiting within a stone's throw for their benefit.

Lady Katherine, remembering the wants of the children, had supplied endless toys and bonbon boxes. In short, no one was forgotten. From the youngest to the oldest a fairy contribution could be found on this wonderful stall.

Lady Kathleen's final act of beneficence was shown in her having marked an exceedingly low price on each of the beautiful articles. In short, a whim had seized her ladyship. Money was of no moment to her; she had spent lavishly, and gone to enormous expense. If every article on the stall were sold, about half the money she had expended would be realized, but that fact mattered nothing at all; her object being not to benefit little Tim Donovan, but to bring honor and renown to her beautiful niece Bridget.

Janet had great taste. She knew in a moment where to place each article to the best advantage; she grouped her colors with an eye to artistic effect; every touch from her deft fingers told. She was so excited and intoxicated with the cheers she had received in the school, and now with this fulfillment of her dearest dream, that her natural talent arose almost to genius. Even Biddy could not help exclaiming with wonder at the results she produced.

"Whatever you are, Janet, you're clever!" she said. "I never saw anything more lovely than this stall; never, never, in all my life!"

"Well," said Janet, "if you admire it, Bridget, be good-natured about it. Whatever is going to happen in the next few hours, let us be happy while the bazaar is going on. Nothing can take place to disturb or frighten us during that time. Let us, therefore, be happy."

"Lady Kathleen Peterham said, miss," remarked one of the men, now approaching Janet, and touching his hat respectfully, "that this box was to be given most especial to you and the other young lady when the stall was decked. Lady Kathleen said you would know what was in it when you opened it, and she'd be sure to be here herself in good time for the fair. Is there anything more that me and my mate can do for you both, young ladies?"

"No, nothing further," said Janet, "we are much obliged. Please clear away the hampers and the pieces of paper and wool in which the different things were wrapped, and if you return to Lady Kathleen say that everything is most satisfactory."

Janet had assumed a slightly commanding air, which suited her well. The men were under the impression that she must be Lady Kathleen's niece. They respectfully attended to her bidding, and, holding the box in her hand, she and Bridget walked round to the other side of the marquee.

It was a large box, and at another time Janet would have been disinclined to burden herself with anything so heavy; but she was in too good a humor now to think of small inconveniences. Attached to the box was pinned a little note. It was directed to Bridget.

"Here!" said Janet, handing it to her. "This is from your aunt; you had better read it at once."

"I don't suppose it matters," said Biddy.

"Of course it matters. I never saw anyone so dull and stupid! Shall I read it to you?"

"If you like."

Janet tore the note open. Her eyes rested on the following words; she read them aloud:

DARLING BIDDY:

I am told that Mrs. Freeman wishes all the stall-holders to wear simple white with green ribbons, but there are different degrees and qualities of this charming combination. I have selected something very simple for you and your friend Miss May to wear on this auspicious occasion. You will find your dresses in the accompanying box. I can promise that they will fit you perfectly.

"O Biddy, Biddy!" said Janet, in excitement, "was there ever anyone so kind as your Aunt Kathleen? Let us bring this box into the house at once, and look at our finery."

Even Bridget was not proof against the charms of a new dress. She had a great love for gay clothing, and one of the small things that fretted her on the occasion of the Fancy Fair was having to wear a book muslin dress, made after a prescribed pattern, with a simple sash of apple-green round her waist.

She, therefore, willingly helped Janet to convey the big box to the house.

In the general excitement and disturbance the girls had no difficulty in conveying it unobserved to Bridget's bedroom, where they eagerly opened it, and pulled out its contents.

Lady Kathleen Peterham had been careful to obey Mrs. Freeman's commands to the letter. The Parisian frocks were also of book muslin, and the sashes to be worn with them were of apple-green. But very wide was the difference between the dresses made by a home dressmaker at Mulberry Court and those which two pairs of eager eyes now feasted on.

Lady Kathleen was quite right when she said that there are many kinds of simple costumes. The quality of this book muslin was of the finest; the embroidery and lace of the most exquisite; the puffings and frillings, the general cut and arrangements, were made in the newest, the most stylish and the most becoming fashion. There was something piquant about these dresses, which removed them many degrees from those which Evelyn Percival, Dorothy Collingwood, and the other girls would wear. There were white silk stockings for the girls' dainty feet, and little apple-green satin shoes with pearl buckles and high heels for them to wear with the stockings; there were rows of shining green beads to clasp round their slender throats; and last, but not least, there were the cunningest and most bewitching little headdresses in the world to perch on their heads of sunny hair.

"Let us dress quickly," said Janet. "Let us slip the dresses on and run down to the marquee and stay there. Oh, what *does* dinner matter? no one will mind whether we dine or not to-day. Let us stay in the marquee until the fair opens; then, even if Mrs. Freeman should disapprove, there won't be time for us to change. O Biddy, can it really be true that I am not only to wear this exquisite costume, but to keep it? Oh, what a woman your Aunt Kathleen is; she is really better than any fairy godmother."

Bridget laughed, and cheered up a good deal while she was putting on her beautiful dress. The two girls dressed with great expedition, and ran down to the marquee, where they amused themselves flitting about from one stall to another until half-past two.

The fair was to open at three, and at half-past two

Mrs. Freeman, the numerous teachers belonging to the school, and the rest of the stall-holders streamed down in a body from the house. The white canvas which concealed the front of the tent was removed, and the different girls bustled to their stalls to give the finishing touches to everything.

Bridget was feeling hungry for want of her dinner, but Janet was too excited and too triumphant to feel the pangs of healthy appetite.

She stood a little in the shadow, a slight tremor of nervousness running through her, notwithstanding her delight.

Mrs. Freeman was the first to enter the marquee; she was accompanied by Evelyn and Dorothy; they all walked straight up to Evelyn's stall. It was in the best position, and commanded the first view as one entered the tent.

Mrs. Freeman had not hitherto seen the stalls; her hand was drawn affectionately through Evelyn's arm, she had a careless and relieved expression on her face which made her look years younger. As she had just remarked to one of the teachers:

"I am like a schoolgirl myself to-day. I mean to slip away from dull care for the next seven weeks."

Mrs. Freeman was a very handsome woman, and in her gray silk dress, and a prettily arranged black lace scarf over her shoulders, she presented a striking and impressive appearance.

"So this is our *first* stall," she exclaimed; "very nice; very nice indeed, Evelyn. I knew you had great taste, dear. I must now see what Janet and Bridget have contrived between them."

Janet took this opportunity to step forward.

The shadow caused by the interior of the tent prevented Mrs. Freeman from at once noticing the marked difference in her dress; she only observed a very graceful girl, whose eyes were shining with happiness, and cheeks flushed with natural excitement.

"Will it not be a good plan," said Janet, "to have the side canvas removed also from the marquee. Visitors can then come in from both sides, and there will be no sun round at this angle. Bridget's and my stall is a good deal in shadow; we should like to have the side canvas removed."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Freeman, "give your own directions, Janet."

Janet ran away, called to one of the gardeners, spoke to him quickly and eagerly, ran up a step ladder herself to show him exactly what was to be done, then, springing to the ground, she caught hold of Bridget's hand and waited with a beating heart for the result.

What might have happened can never be known, but at the very moment when the side canvas dropped, and the full glories of the Parisian stall and the exquisitely dressed girls were exposed to view, a gay, high voice was heard in the distance, and a lady was seen tripping with little runs across the lawn, and advancing rapidly in the direction of the marquee.

Mrs. Freeman at once went to meet this lady. Dorothy, Evelyn, Frances Murray, and the many school teachers stood motionless, transfixed with astonishment.

"Well, after that!" said Dolly at last, "are there fairies alive? Janet, I think you are bewitched; what a stall!"

"I never saw anything so beautiful in my life,"

"LOOK AT THESE GIRLS' DRESSES."—*p.* 189.

said Evelyn; "only I think I ought to have been told."

"It's a nasty, mean trick!" said Frances Murray, "and I for one am not going to be dazzled. It's enchantment, but it's not going to overcome me." She turned away as she spoke; she realized the meaning of the whole thing more quickly than the other two girls.

"Janet, come here," said Evelyn, running up to her, and pulling her forward. "You are dressed in white muslin and green ribbons, but—O Dolly! look at these girls' dresses. There is nothing whatever for us to do but to hide our diminished heads."

"Not a bit of it!" said Dorothy in a stout voice. She turned away; her cheeks were flushed with anger; she had never felt in a greater passion in her life.

"It's a trick to humiliate you, Eva," she said in a whisper. "I might have guessed that Janet would have been up to something; she never wanted you to have anything to do with the fair. You would not have been asked to join at all but for Mrs. Freeman's command, and now she has invented this way to spite us both. I am not going to be cowed, of course; but I never felt so plain and dowdy in my life. I see now why she has taken up with that wretched little Bridget. Oh, why did we clap Janet in the hall just now?"

"Never mind, dear," said Evelyn. "It does not really matter, of course, whose stall is first. In my heart I never in the least cared to take a prominent place in the bazaar. It was just Mrs. Freeman's wish."

"Just Mrs. Freeman's wish!" echoed Dorothy. "It was your right, Evelyn; you know that perfectly well."

"Well, darling, my rights have been taken from me; not that it matters in the very least. Please don't

think that I am angry. Don't let us seem sorry, Dolly; let us resign ourselves to the second position with a good grace."

"Never!" said Dorothy, stamping her foot. "This is the first stall and you are at the head of the fair, whether people buy from us or not. What is that you are saying, Janet? I don't want to listen to you."

"Only," said Janet, "you must not suppose this is my fault. I heard you two muttering together, and I suppose you feel vexed that Bridget's and my stall should be more beautiful than yours. If anyone is to blame in the matter, it's Lady Kathleen Peterham. She said the other day she would give us a contribution from Paris. It arrived this morning. How could we possibly tell that it would be so large and magnificent?"

"And I suppose she sent you those dressses, too?"

"She did, quite unsolicited. Don't you admire them?'

"Go away! I don't want to speak to you!"

"You are making poor Bridget quite unhappy, Dorothy. Biddy, never mind, dear; we will both do our utmost to keep in the shade, and, of course, our stall is the second one, not the first. Whoever thought of its being anything else?"

Janet turned away as she spoke. The rest of the children were now pouring down from the house, and more and more guests were arriving each moment. Lady Kathleen, after keeping Mrs. Freeman talking outside, until the very last instant, now rushed in to survey the premises.

"Ah, my love!" she exclaimed, running up to her niece; "you do look charming! I knew that cut about the shoulders, and that arrangement of sleeve would

suit you, Bridget. Come here, my treasure, and let me look at you, and little May, too; sweet, dear little Mayflower. My darling, let me whisper to you, you look most *recherchée—recherchée*, yes, that is quite the word. Dear loves, your stall does us three immense credit, does it not? Who talks of anyone else being first now—eh, little Mayflower, eh?"

Janet laughed, flushed, and tripped about. Bridget threw her arms round Lady Kathleen, and gave her a hug. Her presence slightly cheered her. The bazaar now really began, and Janet's tact during the long hours of hard work which followed never deserted her.

If Mrs. Freeman were angry she had no opportunity of showing her feelings; neither Bridget nor Janet saw anything of Dolly and Evelyn; they were surrounded by a stream of eager, worshiping, excited, enthusiastic buyers. The dense mob which surrounded this one stall seemed never for a moment to lighten. The girls worked with a will, and money dropped into their boxes unceasingly.

Once Janet could not resist raising herself on tiptoe, and then springing on an empty box, to see how Dolly's and Evelyn's stall was faring.

Two or three sensible old ladies were calmly scrutinizing some well-made children's frocks and pinafores; no one else seemed to be buying; Dorothy and Evelyn did not look at all overworked. Turning her head in another direction Janet saw that even the refreshment stall was in nothing like the favor that her own stall was in. It was not only the very beautiful things to be purchased, but the young stall-holders were so piquant. One of them was so strikingly beautiful, and both presented such an altogether uncommon appearance, that

people pressed forward to obtain a sight of them, and to wonder who they could be.

Finding that the work was too much even for the two indefatigable young sellers, Lady Kathleen herself at last donned a green ribbon badge, and tying on an apron, stepped behind the counter to help the sale. Her good nature, her fun, her quick repartees, made her even a greater favorite than the two girls. The excitement rose now fast and furious. Never, in short, had there been a greater success than Bridget O'Hara's stall.

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL IN THE WOOD.

BUT in the midst of all the fun Janet's heart was not easy.

Last night she had managed very cleverly to induce Miss Delicia to keep silence. She felt as she worked hard at the Fancy Fair, as she made bargains with customers, and laughed and joked and looked the very personification of light-heartedness and gayety, that she must set her wits to work again to-night. Miss Delicia had only promised to keep silence until the fair was over; but Janet was determined that, come what would, Bridget should leave school before Mrs. Freeman knew of her delinquencies.

People were already beginning to depart, when Janet stole up to Lady Kathleen, who was standing in the shade fanning herself with a huge fan.

"Oh, my darling, what a success the whole thing has been," said that good lady. "Aren't you proud, my little Mayflower, of having won the day? I fear the head girl of the school was simply nowhere on this occasion. I am really sorry for her, poor girl. I saw a dowdy, pale-faced, uncouth-looking creature standing by an equally dowdy stall at the other end of the marquee. Is *she* the school favorite—the school *queen*, my love?"

"Yes," said Janet, in a low voice; "but please don't

speak against her, she is a very dear, very sweet girl. I really felt sorry for her and her friend Dolly Collingwood to-day."

"Dolly Collingwood was, I presume, that stout, bouncing looking young person with the red cheeks. I thought she looked very cross. It's sweet of you, Mayflower, to stand up for them both; but if you think that I could allow Bridget O'Hara, my niece, to be overshadowed by girls of that sort, you are pretty well mistaken. Thank goodness, the whole affair has gone off splendidly. You look a little tired, Mayblossom, but very, very sweet. Your dress is most becoming. I am so delighted to find that the new way of puffing the drapery over the shoulders suits a little *mignonne* thing like you. As to Bridget, she is a radiant creature—something like the sun in his strength. You, my dear, resemble the pale moon; but don't be vexed, *chérie*, the moon, too, is very lovely."

"I want to speak to you," said Janet, laying her small hand on the great lady's sleeve. "No, of course, I am not the least bit vexed. How could I be vexed with anything you do? You are quite the kindest friend I have ever come across; but I want to talk to you about Bridget."

"Mercy, child, how solemn you look! What about my lovely girl?"

"It is just this: I don't think she is well. She has a great color in her cheeks, it is true, and her eyes shine; but she has eaten nothing all day, and just now when I touched her hand it burned. I am sure she is feverish, and over-excited. I wish, Lady Kathleen—I do wish, most earnestly—that you would take her from the school to-night."

"To-night!" said Lady Kathleen; "you quite alarm me, Janet May. If Biddy is going to be ill there'll be a frightful to do. Why, she's the only descendant we have any of us got; positively the last of the family; the apple of her old father's eye, the core of my heart. Oh, my colleen, let me get to her at once!"

"Please, please," said Janet, "will you let me speak to you?"

"Yes, you dear little anxious creature, I will. Why, there are positively tears in your eyes! I never saw anyone so tender-hearted. Oh, bother that Fancy Fair, I am sick to death of it! Let us walk here in the shade. Now, my dear love, what is it?"

"I happen to know," said Janet, "that Bridget is perplexed and unhappy; she has taken some morbid views with regard to certain matters, and her illness of body is really caused by the unrestful state of her mind. It would be very bad for her if anyone noticed that she were not well, but if anyone with tact—like yourself, for instance, Lady Kathleen—were to take her right away from the school to-night, she would probably get quite well at once. I cannot reveal to you what is worrying her, and I must beg of you not to allude to the subject to her. In many ways she is a most uncommon girl, and she is new to the sort of things that go on here. She is quite morbid, poor dear, because she has not got up higher in her classes, and has not won a prize; but it would *never* do to mention this to her. Only, Lady Kathleen, please, please, take her away to-night."

"I will," said Lady Kathleen; "I most undoubtedly will. Mum's the word with regard to the reason, of course; but out of this Biddy goes to-day, whatever

happens. I don't stir until she goes with me. But there's just one thing more, my sweet little Janet. When are you going away? where are you going to spend your holidays?"

Janet's eyes drooped.

"I—I don't quite know," she said.

"But I do, my darling. I would not part Biddy from such a tender-hearted, affectionate little friend as you are for the world. If Biddy and I leave Mulberry Court to-night, you leave it to-morrow; and I know where you are going to spend your holidays; at Castle Mahun, in dear old Ireland, with Biddy and her father and me. You'll like that, won't you, sweet Mayflower?"

"But I—I am a poor girl," said Janet, coloring.

Lady Kathleen placed her hand across Janet's lips.

"Not another word," she said; "you are my guest, and I pay for everything. Now, run along, dear, and help Biddy with her packing, you had better not mind the bazaar any more. I'll go and tell her that I am going to take her away with me this evening."

Janet ran off with a beating heart.

She saw daylight in the distance, but she also knew that she was by no means yet out of the wood. Miss Delicia was the most good-natured of women, but she was also not without a strong sense of justice; and even if Miss Delicia could have been induced to keep silence, there was Miss Dent, the English teacher, to be considered. Miss Dent looked fierce and uncomfortable all day. An angry glitter had shone in her eyes whenever she turned them in Bridget's direction; this Janet had not failed to observe. Yes, it was all very well to get Bridget away that evening, and to go with her herself; but she might as well spare all her pains if before

they left Mulberry Court Miss Delicia had an opportunity of telling her story to Mrs. Freeman.

As Janet was running to the house she met the post boy; he handed her the bag, which happened to be unlocked. In the confusion of the morning the key had got mislaid. Janet took it from him, and, opening it, looked eagerly at its contents. There were only two letters; one for herself, the other, in deep mourning, addressed to Mrs. Freeman. The moment Janet saw this letter she knew what it contained; she also knew that here was an open way out of her difficulty. Mrs. Freeman had a first cousin in Liverpool, who was very, very ill. She was intensely attached to this cousin, whose husband wrote to her almost daily with regard to her health. Janet had often seen the letters, and knew the handwriting. Now, when she saw the black-edged letter with the Liverpool postmark on it, she guessed at once that Mrs. Freeman's favorite cousin was dead.

"I know what I'll do," said Janet to herself; "I'll take this letter to Miss Delicia; I'll tell her how I came by it, and beg of her not to let Mrs. Freeman see it until the worries of the day are over. Miss Delicia will be so pleased with me for this thoughtfulness that, perhaps, she will agree that it is best not to worry Mrs. Freeman about Bridget's naughtiness; at any rate, to-night. This is a bit of luck for me! I'll go and find Miss Delicia at once."

It was not easy to discover that most good-natured, bustling, and obliging little woman. Her movements were so quick, her anxiety to make everyone happy so intense, that she had almost the faculty of being in several places at the same time.

After several minutes' active search, Janet found her in one of the attics, cording a schoolgirl's trunk herself.

"Oh, my dear, what is it?" she said, when the girl entered. "How pretty you look in that stylish frock, Janet! I know Henrietta will scold you for wearing it, but I must own that it is becoming. I am to see my sister on that other unpleasant matter about seven o'clock. Now, what is wrong, my dear?"

"I—I have brought you this," said Janet, her face turning pale, and her voice trembling. "I—I am very sorry, but I thought perhaps you would rather Mrs. Freeman did not have this letter just at present; it came in the post bag, which was unlocked. The post boy gave me the bag, and I looked in. There were only two letters, one for me, and this; I—forgive me, Miss Delicia; it has the Liverpool postmark."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Delicia, "a black-edged letter, and from Liverpool; then it is all over; poor Susan is gone. The will of the Lord be done, of course, but this will be a sore blow to Henrietta."

"I—I thought you'd keep it, and give it to her by and by," said Janet.

"Thank you, my dear; very thoughtful of you; very thoughtful, but I think she must receive it at once, for she will probably wish to go to Liverpool to-night. Poor Susan's husband will—will want her. Oh, this is very, very sad; my dear, loving sister, what a blow I shall have to deal to you!"

"You," said Janet; she came up and laid her hand on Miss Delicia's arm; her face turned ashy white, so much depended on this moment; "you—you won't tell about—about Bridget, at the same time," she gasped.

Miss Delicia stared back at Janet in amazement.

"Of course not!" she said. "Who could be so heartless as to worry Henrietta about school matters at a moment like this?"

"You won't tell Miss Patience, either?"

"I shall, probably, say nothing until Henrietta returns to the Court. How queer you look, Janet; are you ill?"

"No, no, I am very well indeed," said Janet. She bent forward and kissed Miss Delicia on her forehead, and then ran out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

PERSIAN CATS.

LADY KATHLEEN PETERHAM had not much difficulty in inducing Bridget to return with her to Eastcliff. The young girl was in a state of intense nervous excitement. She was making up her mind to face disgrace. All through the triumph and supposed pleasure of the Fancy Fair she kept seeing the indignant face of Mrs. Freeman when she heard of the wicked trick which she and Janet had played upon her. She saw her Aunt Kathleen with her shocked, incredulous, unbelieving expression; and last, but not least, she saw her gray-headed old father when the news reached him that the last of the O'Haras—the very last of all the race—had stooped to dishonor.

These thoughts took away Biddy's enjoyment. She became so wretched at last that she almost wished for the crucial hour to be over.

Janet came up to her as the last of the guests were departing.

"It's all right," she whispered. "I have not time to explain matters now, but you have nothing whatever to fear. Leave things in my hands, and don't be nervous, for I assure you everything will be as right as possible."

Bridget had no time to ask Janet to explain her strange words, for the next moment she had turned

away to say something with eagerness to Lady Kathleen.

Lady Kathleen nodded, and looked intensely wise and affectionate.

An hour later Bridget found herself driving away from Mulberry Court, her last frantic endeavors to see Mrs. Freeman by herself having proved utterly fruitless.

"I can't make out what's the matter with you, Biddy!" said her aunt. "Why are you flushing one moment and growing pale the next? I hope to goodness you haven't caught anything. You look quite feverish."

"Oh, I'm all right, Aunt Kathie!" said Bridget. "Please don't worry about my looks; they don't signify in the least."

"Your looks don't signify, Bridget? That's a strange thing to say to me, who was born a Desborough. You are a Desborough yourself, Bridget, on your poor mother's side, and have we not been celebrated for our beauty through a long line of distinguished ancestors? Never let me hear that kind of nonsense fall again from your lips, Biddy. Heaven-born beauty is a gift which ought not to be lightly regarded."

"I have a headache, then," said Bridget. "I suppose I needn't talk if I don't want to?"

"Of course you needn't, pet; and when we go back to the hotel you shall go straight to bed. Oh, how pleased your father will be when we get back to the Castle!"

In reply to this speech Bridget burst into a sudden flood of tears.

"I can't bear it!" she sobbed. "Oh, Aunt Kathie, I have been so naughty! I wanted to see Mrs. Freeman

to tell her everything; but she had just had some bad news, and no one would let me go near her. Oh, I am so miserable! I do hate school most dreadfully. Aunt Kathie, you wouldn't love me if you knew what a bad girl I have been."

"Now, my pet, that is nonsense. I'd just love you through everything. I suppose you have got into a little school scrape? Bless you, Biddy, all the girls do that. Now dry your eyes, and let us think no more about trifles of that sort. Here we are at the hotel, and your holidays have begun. I promise you, you'll never have gayer ones. I have a nice little surprise in store for you, but you are not going to get it out of me to-night."

Bridget did not betray any inordinate curiosity with regard to her aunt's surprise. She cheered up a little, and after a slight supper retired to bed.

In the meantime, Janet May was in her own room at the Court, busily concluding her packing.

The girl who shared her room with her had left that evening. Janet, therefore, had the apartment to herself.

Two letters had come by that evening's post; one which brought to her at least some days of respite, for she was now quite sure that nothing further would be done with regard to Miss Dent's discovery for a week or ten days. It was even possible that the thing might remain in abeyance until the school reassembled.

In any case Janet had now time to breathe.

Two letters had, however, come by the post, and while one gave her relief, the other added to her perplexities.

The other letter was from her sister Sophy.

DEAR JANET [this sister had written] I am waiting anxiously for the moment when the post will bring me your letter with a couple of pounds in it. I simply cannot do without it, as Miss Simpkins has turned me out of doors. I am writing from a little stationer's shop quite close, and I have bribed Annie, the housemaid, to bring me your letter the instant it comes. I have exactly one shilling in my pocket, so you may suppose that I am brought to a low ebb. Miss Simpkins is the very crossest old cat that ever breathed, and I could not help giving her cheek this morning, so she turned me out, and refused to pay me my week's salary. It isn't worth fighting with her, and, of course, I am willing to admit that there were faults on both sides. The stationer's wife will give me a bed to-night, but what *am* I to do afterward? Of course, the money will come from you, you dear, and then I shall immediately start for Margate, and look for you to meet me there. Mrs. Dove, the stationer's wife, knows of a nice little room, which we could share together, for ten shillings a week—that is dirt cheap, as you must know. The address is Mrs. Dove's, 9 Water Street, South Parade. It's a top room—I suppose that means an attic; but, never mind; as Mrs. Dove says, "the higher up you are, the better the air."

Your devoted sister,

SOPHY.

P. S.—Oh, you cruel, cruel Janet! You heartless monster! The post has come and your letter, and *no inclosure*. Mrs. Dove will let me sleep here to-night—she is a kind soul; but, remember, I have only got one shilling in the world, and I vow I will never ask Aunt Jane to help me.

Very early the next morning Janet rose, and going downstairs met one of the servants in the hall.

"I'm going to walk to Eastcliff," she said. "I have got all my boxes packed and directed. They are to be sent by the carrier to-day to the railway station, where they are to be left for me until I send further orders. They will be put into the booking office of course."

"Very well, miss," said the servant, "but you'll want some breakfast of course."

"No, no, I am in a great hurry; I can't possibly wait."

"Have you seen Miss Delicia, Miss May?"

"It's all right," repeated Janet, not heeding this remark. She walked through the hall as she spoke, opened the door herself, and let herself out.

She was neatly dressed in pale gray alpaca; her little sailor hat, with a plain band of white ribbon round it, looked neat and girlish; she carried a thin dust cloak on her arm.

No one could look nicer or sweeter than Janet. She had a sort of good heroine air about her, and this fact struck Lady Kathleen Peterham most forcibly when about eight o'clock that morning the young lady was admitted into her bedroom.

Lady Kathleen was not an early riser.

She was, indeed, sound asleep when her maid brought her a little note on a silver salver. The note contained a few piteous lines from Janet.

I am in great trouble and perplexity [she wrote]; will you see me for one minute?

"The little dear, of course I'll see her," said Lady Kathleen. She had herself arrayed in a rose-colored silk dressing gown, and was sitting up in the shaded light when Janet tripped into the room.

"Oh, how kind of you to let me come," said the girl.

"My love," said Lady Kathleen, "I was expecting you between ten and eleven. I have not broken the news of our charming arrangement yet to Biddy; I know well how delighted she'll be when I do tell her. Why have you come so early, little Mayflower, and what is all this trouble about? You look very nice, my love, notwithstanding your perplexities."

"I am very anxious," said Janet; and then she proceeded to tell a long and pathetic story about Sophy; Sophy was so pretty, but also so willful; she was older than Janet, but she also leaned upon her. She had just been turned out of her situation owing to the cruelty of her employer, and—and—of course Janet could not go to Ireland and leave her dear older sister in such a plight; she had saved a few shillings, and she was going to take the very next train to Bristol to see her.

The words that Janet hoped Lady Kathleen would utter fell at once from the good lady's lips. "My darling," she said, "you and this naughty, pretty little sister of yours shall both come to Castle Mahun. My brother-in-law, dear fellow, will give you the best of Irish welcomes; of course he will, you sweet little brave soul; why it's a heroine you are, and no mistake."

Janet replied in a very humble and pretty manner to these gratifying words of praise, and soon a plan which she had already sketched out in her own mind was proposed to her by Lady Kathleen.

"You and your sister can cross over from Bristol to Cork," she said. "From there it is only a short distance to Castle Mahun. Biddy and I will start for home to-day, and we'll expect you in a day or two after. Oh, my dear, you want a little money; I know you're poor, darling, and I am rich, so where are the odds? It's no worry to me, but a pleasure to help you. Give me your address in Bristol, and I'll send you a postal order before Biddy and I leave Eastcliff to-day."

Janet's eyes fell, and her heart sank a trifle.

It would have been so much nicer to have got the money now; she did not want to spend Biddy's two pounds if she could help it. Her intention, indeed, had

been to get a postal order to send off to Pat Donovan before she left Eastcliff, but Lady Kathleen, who had risen to all Janet's other suggestions, failed her in this.

There was no help for it, therefore, she must spend part of the two pounds in taking her railway ticket to Bristol, and could only trust that Biddy would never hear of the non-reception of her gift.

Janet bade Lady Kathleen an affectionate good-by and tripped off on her errand of sisterly mercy.

She sent a telegram to Sophy, and found her standing on the platform at Bristol waiting to receive her.

Sopyh was smaller than Janet, a plump, softly rounded little person, with wide-open eyes of heavenly blue, rosebud lips, and masses of shining golden hair. At the first glance people as a rule fell in love with Sophy; how long they continued in this state of devotion was quite another matter, but the impression she made with those large-eyed innocent glances was always favorable, and served her in good stead as she fought her way through the world.

She was not nearly as clever as Janet, but that very fact added to her charms, for she had a way of confiding her troubles, of looking pathetic and asking such touchingly simple questions with regard to her future that, unless the person she addressed was very suspicious indeed, the little good-humored pretty creature was taken at once to the heart of her sympathizer.

"Oh, here you are, Janey," she exclaimed, rushing up to her sister now and clasping a plump little hand affectionately through her arm.

She was really fond of Janet, and Janet really cared for her, but as the two were perfectly open with each

other it was unnecessary in Janet's opinion to waste time in sentiment.

"Yes, I have come," she said, "and very troublesome it is to me to have to come. Why couldn't you keep your situation, Sophy?"

"Oh, my darling," exclaimed Sophy, "if you had been me! you don't know—you can't possibly know what Miss Simpkins is like. She is full of the most awful fads, and she fusses so about the cats. There were four cats when I first went to her, and now there are six, all Persians, and every one of them affected with the most terrible bronchitis. They have to be doctored and medicined and their hair combed out, and watched like any number of babies. I do think, Janey, I really do think that I might have a higher vocation in life than looking after Persian cats."

"That's stuff," said Janet. "Don't you prefer looking after Persian cats to living with Aunt Jane?"

"I am not quite sure, Janet."

"But I am!" said Janet, favoring her sister with a quick, angry glance. "I wouldn't eat the bread of dependence for anybody; but now let's come back to Mrs. Dove's and have a talk."

"Is there any money, Janey?" whispered Sophy, in an appealing tone. "I told you that I had only a shilling, and it is absolutely true. I ought to pay something for my bed, and she gave me some tea and a nice new laid egg, lightly boiled, for breakfast. If I pay her the whole shilling it will be cheap; very cheap, for what she has done for me. I do trust and hope you have brought a little money with you, Janet!"

"I have brought a little. It was very hardly come

by, I can tell you, and will have to go a tremendous long way. I may get into an awful scrape about that money, and I really don't see why I should run such risks for your sake."

"O Janey, Janey, and you know I'd do anything in the world for you."

Sophy's lovely eyes slowly filled with tears. Janet gave her a quick half-contemptuous, half-affectionate glance.

"There," she said, "you needn't fret; I daresay everything will be all right, and I have something very jolly to tell you in a minute or two. Only let us get to your lodgings first, for we can't talk comfortably in this noisy street."

The girls presently reached the poky little house where Sophy had spent her night. They went up at once to a tiny room with a sloping roof, and there Janet proceeded to administer a very sound lecture to her sister.

"I have something unpleasant to talk about before I say anything nice," she began. "You must first hear me out, whether you like it or not, for if you cry until your eyes are sunk into your head it won't make the least bit of difference to me. Speak I will, for it is for your good and mine."

No one could cry more copiously than Sophy on occasions, but she also had a certain power of self-control. If her tears could effect no object there was not the least use in her spoiling her pretty eyes, so she sat very still now on the edge of the small hard bed, and gazed at Janet, who sat opposite to her on a cane-bottomed chair.

"The first thing to be done is this," said Janet; "I

must see Miss Simpkins, and ask her if she will take you back after the holidays are over."

"I won't go!" said Sophy, clenching her fist.

"That is nonsense, Sophy; you will either have to go to Miss Simpkins or to Aunt Jane. Aunt Jane will half starve you, and give you no money at all; Miss Simpkins will feed you well—I know she does that, or you'd be sure to tell me the contrary—then Miss Simpkins gives you fifteen pounds a year. That being the case, there is no choice at all between the two posts. Miss Simpkins's, notwithstanding the Persian cats, is much the best place for you to live at."

"Oh, you don't know," said Sophy; "it's the most horrid life. Besides, she wouldn't have me again; I know she wouldn't. We were both frightfully impertinent to each other. We were like two cats ourselves. Miss Simpkins was the old tabby, and I was the angry, snarling kitten. I have claws, you know, Janet, although I do look so velvety."

"I know perfectly well that you have claws, my dear, but you must keep them sheathed. As to going back to Miss Simpkins, I shall see her myself, and I am sure I can manage that part. You have got to come with me there after we have finished our present conversation, and you have got to beg her pardon in the most humble and proper fashion."

"I really don't know how I am to do it, Janey."

"But I do, love; you must just lean on me, and do exactly what I advise; it won't be for the first time."

"I know that," said poor Sophy, "and you are three years younger than me, and all. I didn't think you'd be such an awful tyant; it seems rather hard to bear from one's younger sister."

"But I am older in mind, darling."

"Yes, yes, and much cleverer; but after all a worm *will* turn. Suppose I refuse to go back to Miss Simpkins?"

"Then, my love, I will try and screw together sufficient money to send you back third class to Aunt Jane's."

"Oh, I can't; I won't do that; it would be too horrible!"

"Listen to me, Sophy. I always said I would help you. You are very pretty, but you are not clever. You have not been educated up to the required standard; you have no chance whatever of getting a situation as governess. In these days it is the most difficult thing in the world for lady-girls who are not educated, and have not got special talents, to find anything at all to do. You are in great luck in getting this situation as companion, and I am absolutely determined that you shall not lose it. In two years' time I shall have left school. My object then is to get a good situation as English and musical teacher in one of the high schools. When I have got such a post, I may want you to live with me, Sophy, as housekeeper; there is no saying. You would like that, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, shouldn't I! What larks we'd have."

"Yes, we'd have a jolly time together; but there's not the least use in thinking about it if you don't do what I tell you now. Put your hat on straight, Sophy, and don't let your hair look quite so wild and fluffy, and we will go across to Miss Simpkins's without delay. I have a very jolly plan to propose to you after you have made your peace with the old lady and the Persian cats, but not even a hint with regard to it

shall drop from my lips until you have been a good girl."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," said Sophy, "I don't know how I am ever to face the old tabby cat again."

"That's a very improper way to speak of your employer, and I'm not going to laugh. Come; are you ready?"

"I wish you weren't such a Solon, Janet."

"It is well I have got some brains; I don't know where you and I would be if I hadn't. Now, come along."

"But I am not to go back and live with her today?"

"No, no, I'll manage that; you shall have your bit of fun first, poor Sophy. Now come at once, we have not a moment of time to lose."

Sophy straightened her hat very unwillingly, brushed back her disordered locks with considerable rebellion in each movement, but finally followed Janet down into the street and across the narrow road into the fashionable locality where Miss Simpkins and the Persian cats resided.

Miss Simpkins lived in a small house, which was kept scrupulously clean and bright. There were flower boxes in all the windows, and the shining brass knocker and handles of the door reflected the faces of the two girls like mirrors.

A neat but severe-looking servant answered Janet's rather determined ring. She scowled at Sophy, but replied civilly to Janet's inquiry if Miss Simpkins was at home.

"Yes, miss," she replied; "my missus is in her morning room, very particularly occupied."

"I should like to see her for a few minutes," said Janet.

"I am afraid, miss, that if you have come on behalf of that young lady, the late companion, that you may spare yourself the trouble, for the missus won't have nothing to say to her nor her belongings."

"I have come on that business," said Janet. "I am much shocked at what has occurred, and have come to offer apologies. My sister, Miss May, has behaved with great indiscretion."

Poor Sophy gasped.

Janet did not pay the smallest heed to Sophy's indignant expression. Her smooth young face looked full of shocked virtue. It impressed the servant, who nodded back a sympathetic reply, and telling the girls to wait a minute, walked sedately across the hall and into the morning room.

She returned in a few moments with the information that Miss Simpkins would see the younger of the young ladies.

"I can put you, Miss May," she said, turning to Sophy, "into the hall room while the other young lady talks to my missus."

"Yes, Sophy, go there and wait," said Janet; and Sophy went.

Janet tripped lightly across the tiled hall.

The servant opened the door of the morning room and then turned to inquire the young lady's name.

"Miss Janet May," was the response.

"Miss Janet May!" shouted the servant, and Janet found the door closed behind her.

A severe looking woman, primly dressed, was seated by a round mahogany table. In the center of the table

sat a snow-white and very beautiful Persian cat; a dark tabby of the same species was lapping a saucer of milk also on the table; some Persian kittens gamboled about the room. Miss Simpkins was bending over the tabby. She raised her eyes now and murmured, half to herself, half to Janet, "She has taken exactly a tenth of a pint of milk! That is a great improvement on yesterday."

"I am sure of it," said Janet, entering into the spirit of the thing without a moment's delay; "and what an exquisite cat! and oh! what a beauty that white one is! I do admire Persian cats!"

"Do you, my dear?" said the old lady. "This cat—Cherry Ripe I call her—has won several prizes at the Crystal Palace. This tabby—his name is Pompey—will also, I expect, be a prize-winner. These two kittens that you see on the floor, Marcus Aurelius and Mark Antony, have been sent to me direct from Persia. They are most valuable animals. The Persian cat is a curious and remarkable creature. Don't you think so? so sadly delicate! so fragilely beautiful! so sensitive and refined in every movement! Breed is shown in each of its actions. These cats are lovely—almost too lovely—and yet, my dear, whatever care you take of them, they all suffer more or less from bronchitis! they all swallow their long hairs when they wash themselves! and they all die young. Beautiful darlings! it is too touching to think of your inevitable fate!"

Miss Simpkins, as she spoke, stroked the snow-white Persian with her long, slender fingers.

Janet murmured some words of rapture, and the old lady asked her to seat herself.

The subject of Sophy was introduced in a few moments, and here Janet showed that talent for diplomacy which always marked her actions. Miss Simpkins found, as she listened to the admirable words which dropped from the lips of this young girl, her anger fading. After all, Sophy had some good points. The white Persian cat liked to nestle on her shoulder, and rub its soft head against her soft cheek. Miss Simpkins fancied that the cat looked melancholy since Sophy's departure. In short, knowing well in her heart that she would find it extremely difficult to get anyone else to take the much-enduring Sophy's place, she consented to have her back again on trial.

"But not at once," said Miss Simpkins, "for I have just let this house, furnished, to a friend. I don't really know what your sister will do, Miss May, but Barker and I and the cats are quite as many as can travel comfortably together. I shall be back here by the end of September, and will receive your sister, if she faithfully promises to behave herself."

These terms being quite to Janet's satisfaction, she closed with Miss Simpkins's offer, and left the house in Sophy's company in high good humor.

"Now you have behaved well, and you shall hear of the treat I have in store for you," she said to her sister. "But, first of all, let us go to one of the shipping offices to find out at what hour the next steamer sails for Cork."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IRISH WELCOME.

CASTLE MAHUN was the sort of old place which can be met in many parts of Ireland. It consisted of almost innumerable acres of land, some cultivated, some wild and barren, and of a large, rambling, and, in parts, tumble-down house. Castle Mahun stood on rising ground which faced due west. The ground was beautifully shaped, with many gentle undulations and many steep and bold descents. It was thickly wooded, and some of these forests of almost primeval trees sloped down to the edge of a deep, wide lake of nearly two miles in length and half a mile in width. This lake was the pride of Castle Mahun. In sunshiny weather it looked blue as the sea itself; in winter its waters became dark and turbid, the high waves tossed them and made themselves at times as angry as if they were really influenced by the many currents and the tides of ocean. The lake had two names. The owners of the property called it Lake Crena, but the poor people—and they abounded all over the lands of Castle Mahun—spoke of it as the Witch's Cauldron, and said that although it was fair enough, and pleasant enough to live by in summer, in winter it was haunted by a black witch, and woe betide anyone who attempted to boat on its surface or fish in its waters at that time of year.

The Castle, or rather old house—for it bore little

pretensions to its name—hung partly over the lake. There were sloping lawns, badly tended, but very picturesque in appearance, running down to the waters, and a steep path, about three feet in width, with a sheer precipice at one side, and a thick, heavy belt of forest trees at the other, running right round the lake from one side of the old house.

This was called the terrace walk, and it was here Dennis O'Hara took his evening promenade, accompanied by the dogs.

He was a handsome, picturesque looking man, with silvery white hair, very piercing dark eyes, and aquiline features. He had a stentorian voice, which he used to good effect on all those who came within his reach; but he had also a kindly twinkle in those dark eyes, and a kindly expression round his handsome, well-cut lips, which kept the poor folks at Castle Mahun from fearing the master's indignant bursts of strong language, and which made him one of the most popular landlords all over the country.

To-night there was great excitement at Castle Mahun, for the banished princess, as the people chose to consider Bridget O'Hara, was coming home from foreign parts. Bonfires were lit all along the hills in her welcome. O'Hara had not gone himself to the nearest railway station, twenty miles off, to meet his daughter, but he knew by the thin smoke on a distant peak that the jaunting car, drawn by faithful Paddy, his favorite chestnut horse, and driven by Larry O'Connor, was bearing his darling back to him as quickly as the ill-kept roads would permit.

"She's coming, masther," shouted a ragged little urchin, dashing up to the squire, and then rushing fran-

tically away again; "the first fire's built, and me and Molly can see the smoke. Oh, come along, Molly! and let's run down the road to ketch a sight of her. Oh, glory! the darlint! and won't we be glad to have her back again."

The child disappeared. There were some more wild shouts in the distance; a troop of children, all ragged and bronzed and barefooted, were seen rushing down the avenue, and then disappearing along the dusty road. They carried branches of trees and old kettle-drums, and made a frantic noise as they ran in the direction which the jaunting car would take.

"Ah! here they are!" exclaimed Lady Kathleen from her seat on the car. "Here are your villagers, Bridget, rushing to welcome you. And do you see those fires lit in your honor? Watch the hills, child. There's a fire on every hilltop. Now you'll be yourself again."

Bridget's eyes were shining like stars. She turned and gripped Lady Kathleen's hand with a fierce embrace.

"I feel nearly mad with delight!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I say, Larry, do drive faster. Gee-up, Paddy! Gee-up, old dear! Don't you think I might take the reins, Larry? You can get down from your seat on the box, and sit here to balance Aunt Kathleen, and let me jump up and take the reins."

"To be sure, miss," said Larry. He sprang lightly from his seat, and Biddy, notwithstanding Lady Kathleen's bursts of laughter and futile objections, took the seat of honor, and with a light, smart touch of the whip sent Paddy spinning at a fine rate over the roads.

"Hurrah!" she shouted when she came in sight of

the motley crowd. "Here I am back again, and driving Paddy as if I'd never set foot off Irish soil. Welcome to you all! Good-evening, Dan; how's your lame foot? Good-evening Molly, acushla macree. Good-evening, good-evening, Jane and Susan and Norah. Now, then, let me drive quickly. I must get to my daddy before I touch the hands of one of you."

Bridget stood up on the driving seat, tightened the reins with energy, gave Paddy another well-aimed delicate stroke just where it would quicken his movements without irritating either his skin or his temper, and the laughing, shouting, joking cavalcade—for the children and the men and women were rushing after the car, and some of them even clinging on to it—turned in at the gates, and up the steep avenue which led to the Castle.

"Now, then; three cheers for the old home! Let every one of us shout with a will!" exclaimed Bridget. "Oh, it is nice to be back again."

"You'll frighten the horse, Biddy!" exclaimed Lady Kathleen. "I do think you have taken leave of your senses, child. Oh, don't set them off shouting; Paddy really won't stand it; and at this steep part, too!"

"Paddy is Irish," said Bridget, with some contempt. "He knows what an Irish shout is worth. Now, then! Three cheers—Hip, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Bridget held the reins with one hand, the other was waved high in the air. She looked like a radiant, victorious young figure standing so, with the crowd of welcoming, delighted faces surrounding her. Her traveling hat had long ago disappeared, and her chestnut curls were tumbling about her face and shoulders.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" she shouted again. "Three cheers for the Castle! Three cheers for the master!

"YOU HAVE COME BACK."—*p.* 219.

Three cheers for the dogs! Three cheers for old Ireland! and three cheers for the boys and girls who live at Castle Mahun!"

Frantic yells responded to Bridget's eager words. These were intermingled by the yelping and barking of about a dozen dogs, who rushed on the scene, and jumped all over Bridget in their ecstasy, nearly dragging her from her eminence on the car.

"Take the reins, Larry!" she exclaimed, tossing them to her satellite. "Now then, do get out of the way, Bruin! Clear out, Mustard, my pet, or I'll tread on you. Now then for a spring!"

She vaulted lightly to the ground, and the next instant was in the arms of her white-headed old father.

"Eh, my colleen, my colleen," he murmured. He pressed her to his heart; a dimness came over his eyes for a minute; his big, wrinkled hand touched her sunny forehead tenderly. "You have come back," he said. "I have had a fine share of the heart-hunger without you, my girleen."

Bridget laid her head on his shoulder.

"Oh, daddy," she exclaimed, in a sort of choked voice, "it is too good to feel your arms about me again; I am too happy."

"Don't you want to see Minerva's pups, miss?" asked the small and rather officious little ragged girl called Molly.

"Yes, to be sure. And she has had four, the darling; the dear, noble pet. Do take me to the litter at once, won't you, father?"

The mention of Minerva and her progeny was so intensely exciting that even sentiment was put aside, and the Squire, Biddy, Lady Kathleen, and all the re-

tainers went in a motley procession to the stables, where the little red-tipped pups were huddled together, and the proud Minerva was waiting to show off their many beauties.

Biddy made several appropriate observations; not a point about the four little dogs was lost upon her. She and her father grew almost solemn in the earnestness with which they discussed the virtues and charms of the baby pups.

Minerva was petted and praised; hunger and fatigue were alike forgotten in the exciting and delicious task of examining the valuable puppies. Bridget knelt on the ground, regardless of her pretty and expensive traveling dress. A pup's short, expressive nose rubbed her cool cheek, Minerva's head lay on her knee; the animal's beautiful, expressive eyes were raised to hers, full of maternal pride and melting love. Another little pup lay on the Squire's big palm, a third nestled on Biddy's shoulder; a fourth tried to yelp feebly as it was huddled up in Molly's ragged apron.

Lady Kathleen stood over the group of adorers laughing and ejaculating. Somebody screamed in the distance that supper was ready, and that a feast was waiting in the kitchen for all the retainers in honor of Miss Bridget's return.

There was a scamper at this; even Molly put the cherished pup back into its basket, and Bridget, her father, and aunt entered the house arm in arm.

CHAPTER XIX.

"BRUIN, MY DOG."

TWO days afterward Lady Kathleen called Bridget aside, and, linking her hand through her arm, said in an affectionate tone:

"If you can spare me five minutes, Biddy, I have a pleasant little bit of news to give you."

Bridget O'Hara had resumed all the finery which had been more or less tabooed at school. The time was seven o'clock, on a summer's evening. She had on a richly embroidered tea gown of pale green silk, a silver girdle clasped her slim waist, the long train of her dress floated out behind her; it was partly open in front, and revealed a petticoat of cream satin, heavily embroidered with silver.

Strictly speaking, the dress was a great deal too old for so young a girl; but it suited Biddy, whose rich and brilliant coloring, and whose finely formed and almost statuesque young figure could carry off any amount of fine clothing. She and Lady Kathleen were standing on the terrace walk, which looked down on the lake. Its waters were tranquil as glass to-night; a few fleecy clouds in the sky were reflected on its bosom. A little boat with a white sail, which flapped aimlessly for want of wind to fill it, was to be seen in the distance. The Squire was directing the boat's wayward course, but it was making its way after a somewhat shambling fashion

to the nearest landing-place. Bridget waved a handkerchief in the air.

"Turn the boat a bit, daddy, and the sail will fill," she shouted. "Now, then, Aunt Kathleen, what is it you want to say to me?"

"If you will only attend, Biddy," said Lady Kathleen. "Your thoughts are with your father, child; he's as safe as safe can be. Hasn't he sailed on the waters of Lake Crena since he was a little dot no higher than my knee?"

"But it is called the Witch's Cauldron, too," said Bridget, her eyes darkening. "They say that misfortune attends on those who are too fond of sailing on its waters."

Lady Kathleen laughed.

"You superstitious colleen," she said; "as if any sensible person minded what 'they say.'"

"All right, Aunt Kathleen, what's your news? what are you exciting yourself about?"

"I'm thinking of you, my pet, and how dull it must be for you after all the young companions you had at school."

"Dull for me at the Castle?" exclaimed Bridget, opening her big eyes wide. "Dull in the same house with daddy, and the servants, and the dogs? I don't understand you!"

"Well, my darling, that's just your affectionate way. You are very fond of your father and the dogs, of course. The dogs are the dogs, but you needn't try to blind me, my dearie dear. To the end of all time the young will seek the young, and boys and girls will herd together."

"Well, there are my cousins, Patrick and Gerald, coming next week."

"Just so. Fine bits of lads, both of them; but, when all is said and done, only lads. Now, girls want to be together as well as boys; they have their bits of secrets to confide to one another, and their bits of fun to talk over, and their sly little jokes to crack the one with the other; they have to dream dreams together, and plan what their future will be like. What a gay time they'll have in the gay world, and what conquests they'll make, and whose eyes will shine the brightest, and whose dress will be the prettiest, and which girl will marry the prince by and by, and which will find her true vocation in a cottage. Oh, don't you talk to me, Bridget; I know the ways of the creatures, and the longings of them, and the fads of them. Haven't I gone through it all myself?"

"You do seem excited, Aunt Kathleen, but you must admit too that there are girls and girls, and that this girl——"

"Now, I admit nothing, my jewel. Look here, my cushla macree, you're the soul of unselfishness, but you shall have your reward. You shall have girls to talk to and to play with, and by the same token they are coming this very moment on the jaunting car to meet you."

"Who are coming on the jaunting car?" asked Bridget, in a voice of alarm.

"Well now, I knew you'd be excited; I knew you better than you knew yourself. Your face tells me how delighted you are. That dear little Janet May, that sweet little friend of yours, the girl you are as thick as peas with, is going to spend the holidays at Castle Mahun. I sent Larry off with the jaunting car after the early dinner to the station to meet her. She'll be here in a minute or two with a sister of hers whom she's

nearly as fond of as she is of yourself. Now, isn't that a surprise for you, my pet?"

"It is," said Bridget, in a low voice.

It was against all the preconceived ideas of the O'Haras to show even by the faintest shadow of discontent that they were wanting in hospitality. Bridget felt that the high spirits which had been hers during the last two days, which had lifted the weight of care, and the dreadful sensation of having done wrong, from her young heart, had now taken to themselves wings, and that the awful depressed sensation which used to try her so much at Mulberry Court must be once again her portion.

"You're pleased, aren't you, Biddy?" said Aunt Kathleen.

"Of course," said Bridget, in an evasive tone, "but there's daddy just landing, let me run to him."

She flew away, skimming down the steep ascent with the agility of a bird. She was standing by her father's side, flushed and breathless, when he stepped out of the little boat.

"Eh, colleen," he exclaimed, "what do you say to coming for a sail with me?"

"Give me a hug, daddy."

"That I will, my girl; eh, my jewel, it's good to feel your soft cheek. Now, then, what are you rubbing yourself against me for, like an affectionate pussy cat?"

"Nothing. I can't go for a sail, though; it's a bother, but it can't be helped."

"And why can't it be helped, if we two wish it, I want to know?"

"There are visitors coming to the Castle; we'll have to entertain them, daddy."

"Visitors! of course, right welcome they'll be; but I didn't know of any. Who are they? Do you think it's the O'Conors now, or may be the Mahoneys from Court Macherry. What are you staring at me like that for, child? If there are visitors coming, you and I must go and give them a right good hearty welcome; but who in the world can they be?"

"One of them is a schoolfellow of mine, her name is Janet May."

"Janet May," repeated the squire; "we don't have those sort of names in Ireland. A schoolfellow of yours? Then, of course, she'll be right welcome. A great friend, I suppose, my pet? She'll be welcome; very welcome."

"Look at me, daddy, for a minute," said Bridget, speaking quickly and in great excitement. "Let us welcome her, as of course all true Irish people ought to welcome their guests, but don't let's talk about her when you and I are alone. She has a sister coming too, and there's Aunt Kathleen waving her hands to us, and gesticulating. They must have arrived. If I had known it, I'd have ordered the bonfires to be lit on the hilltops, but I did not hear a thing about it until aunty told me a few minutes ago."

"It was remiss of Kathleen, very remiss," said the squire. "It is positively wanting in courtesy not to have the bonfires lit. Let's go up at once, Biddy, and meet your guests in the porch."

Squire O'Hara took his daughter's hand. They climbed the ascent swiftly together, and were standing in the porch, Lady Kathleen keeping them company, when the jaunting car drew up.

To an Irish person bred and born there is no more

delightful mode of locomotion than this same jaunting car, but people fresh to the Emerald Isle sometimes fail to appreciate its merits.

The jaunting car requires an easy and yet an assured seat. No clutching at the rails, no faint suspicion on the countenance of its occupant that there is the least chance of being knocked off at the next abrupt turn of the road, or the next violent jolt of the equipage. You must sit on the jaunting car as you would on your horse's back, as if you belonged to it, as the saying goes.

Now, strangers to Ireland have not this assured seat, and although Janet was too clever and too well bred to show a great deal of the nervousness she really felt, she could not help clinging frantically to the rail at the end of her side, and her small face was somewhat pale, and her lips tightly set. She had maneuvered hard for this invitation, she had won her cause, all had gone well with her; but this awful, bumping, skittish rollicking car might after all prove her destruction. What a wild horse drew this terrible car! What a reckless looking coachman aided and abetted all his efforts at rushing and flying over the ground! Oh, why did they dash down that steep hill? why did they whisk round this sudden corner? She must grasp the rail of her seat still tighter. She would not fall off, if nerve and courage could possibly keep her on; but would they do so?

Janet had plenty of real pluck, but poor Sophy was naturally a coward. They had not gone a mile on the road before she began to scream most piteously.

"I won't stay on this awful, barbarous thing another minute," she shrieked. "I shall be dashed to pieces, my brains will be knocked out. Janet, Janet, I say,

Janet, if you don't get the driver to stop at once I'll jump off."

"Oh, there aint the least soight of fear," said Larry, whisking his head back in Sophy's direction with a contemptuous and yet good-humored twinkle in his eyes.

"I can't stay on; you *must* pull the horse up," shrieked the frightened girl. "I can't keep my seat; I am slipping off, I tell you I am slipping off. I'll be on the road in another minute."

"Here then, Pat, you stay quiet, you baste," said Larry.

He pulled the spirited little horse up, until he nearly stood on his haunches, then, jumping down himself, came up to Sophy's side.

"What's the matter, miss?" he said; "why, this is the very safest little kyar in the county. You just sit aisy, miss, and don't hould on, and you will soon take foine to the motion."

"No, I won't," said Sophy. "I'll never take to it; I am terrified nearly out of my senses. I'll walk to that Castle of yours, whatever the name of it is."

"You can't do that, miss, for it's a matther of close on twenty mile from here."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" Sophy began to cry. "I wish I'd never come to this outlandish, awful place!" she exclaimed, forgetting all her manners in her extremity. "Janet, how heartless of you to sit like that, as if you didn't think of anyone but yourself! I'd much rather be back with Aunt Jane, or even taking care of those horrid Persian cats. Oh, anything would be better than this!"

"Don't you cry, miss," said Larry, who was a very good-natured person. "The little kyar is safe as safe

can be; but maybe, seeing as you're frightened, miss, you'd like to sit in the well. We has a pretty big well to this jaunting car, and I'll open it out and you can get in."

The well which divided the two seats (running between them, as anyone who knows an Irish jaunting car will immediately understand) was a very small and shallow receptacle for even the most diminutive adult, but "any port in a storm," thought poor Sophy. She scrambled gratefully into the well, and sat there curled up, looking very foolish, and very abject.

The two travelers were therefore in a somewhat sorry plight when they arrived at the Castle, and Sophy's appearance was truly ridiculous.

Not a trace of mirth, however, was discernible on the faces of the kind host, his sister-in-law, and daughter as they came out to meet their guests.

Dennis O'Hara lifted Sophy in a twinkling to the ground. Janet devoutly hoped that she would not be killed as she made the supreme effort of springing from the car. Then began a series of very hearty offers of friendship and hospitality.

"Welcome, welcome," said the squire. "I'm right glad to see you both. Welcome to Castle Mahun! And is this your first visit to Ireland, Miss—Miss May?"

"Yes," said Janet, immediately taking the initiative, "and what a lovely country it is!"

"I agree with you," said the squire, giving her a quick, penetrating, half-pleased, half-puzzled glance. "I must apologize for not having bonfires lit in your and your sister's honor; but Lady Kathleen didn't tell me I was to have the pleasure of your company until a few minutes ago."

"I kept it as a joyful surprise," said Lady Kathleen; "but now, Dennis, let the two poor dear girls come in. They look fit to drop with fatigue. And so this is your little sister Sophy, Mayflower! I am right glad to see you, my dear. Welcome to Old Ireland, the pair of you; I will take you up myself to your room. Biddy, darling! Biddy!"

But, strange to say, Biddy was nowhere to be seen.

There was a little old deserted summerhouse far away in a distant part of the grounds, and there, a few minutes afterward, might have been heard some angry, choking, half-smothered sobs. They came from a girl in a pale green silk dress, who had thrown herself disconsolately by the side of a rustic table, and whose hot tears forced themselves through the fingers with which she covered her face.

"I can't bear it," she said to herself. "I can't be hospitable, and nice, and friendly, and yet I suppose I must. What would father say if one of the O'Haras were wanting in courtesy to a visitor? Oh, dear! how I *hate* that girl! I didn't think it was in me to hate anyone as I hate her! I hate her, and I—I *fear her!* There's a confession for Bridget O'Hara to make. She's afraid of someone! She's afraid of a wretched poor small specimen of humanity like that! But it is quite true; that girl has got a power over me. She has got me into her net. Oh, what induced Aunt Kathleen to ask her here? Why should the darling beloved Castle be haunted by her nasty little sneaking presence? Why should my holidays be spoiled by her? This is twenty times worse than having her with me at school, for we were at least on equal terms there, and we are not here. She's my visitor here, and I must be polite

to her. I don't mind that abject looking sister of hers, who sat huddled up in the well of the car, one way or the other; but Janet is past enduring. Oh, Aunt Kathleen, what have you done to me?"

Bridget sobbed on stormily. The old sensation of having lowered herself, of being in disgrace with herself, was strongly over her. She hated herself for being angry at having Janet in the house, for so strong were her instincts of hospitality that even to think an uncourteous thought toward a visitor seemed to her to be like breaking the first rules of life.

She had rushed to the summerhouse to give herself the comfort of a safety valve. She must shed the tears which weighed against her eyes. She must speak aloud to the empty air some of the misery which filled her heart. She was quite alone. It was safe for her to storm here; she knew that if she spent her tears in this safe retreat she would be all the better able to bear her sorrows by and by.

As she sobbed, thinking herself quite alone, the little rustic door of the old summerhouse was slowly and cautiously pushed open, and a dog's affectionate, melting eyes looked in.

The whole of a big shaggy head protruded itself next into view, four big soft feet pattered across the floor, and a magnificent thoroughbred Irish greyhound laid his head on the girl's knee.

"O Bruin, Bruin; oh, you darling!" exclaimed Bridget. "I can tell *you* how sorry I am! I can tell *you* how mean and horrid and contemptible I feel! Kiss me, Bruin; let me love you, you darling! you darling! You'll never tell that you found me like this, will you, Bruin?"

"Never!" said Bruin's eyes. "Of course not; what can you be thinking about? And now cheer up, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," said Bridget, answering their language. "Oh, what a great comfort you are to me, Bruin, my dog!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SQUIRE AND HIS GUESTS.

THE great bell clanged out its hospitable boom for supper. Supper was a great institution at the Castle. It was the meal of the day. A heterogeneous sort of repast, at which every conceivable eatable, every available luxury, graced the board. From tea, coffee, and bread and butter to all sorts of rich and spiced dishes, nothing that the good-humored Irish cook could produce was absent from the squire's supper table.

It was the one meal in the day at which he himself ate heartily. The squire ate enough then to satisfy himself for the greater part of the twenty-four hours; for, with the exception of a frugal breakfast at eight in the morning, which consisted of tea, bread and butter, and two new-laid eggs, he never touched food again until the great evening meal, which was tea, supper, and dinner in one.

People had easy times at Castle Mahun. There was no stiffness anywhere. The rule of the house was to go where you pleased, and do what you liked. Once a visitor there, you might, as far as Squire O'Hara was concerned, be a visitor for all the rest of your natural life. Certainly no one would think of hinting at the possibility of your going. When you did take it into your head to depart, you would be warmly invited to renew your visit at the first available opportunity, and

the extreme shortness of your stay, even though that stay had extended to months, would be openly commented upon and loudly regretted. But, as in each fortress there is one weak spot, and as in every rule there is the invariable exception, the Squire did demand one thing from his own family and his visitors alike, and that was a punctual attendance in the lofty dining hall of the Castle at suppertime.

Bridget heard the bell twanging and sounding, and knew that the summons to appear at supper had gone forth. She mopped away her tears with a richly embroidered cambric handkerchief, stuffed it into her pocket, looked with a slight passing regret at some muddy marks which Bruin had made on her silk dress, and prepared to return to the house.

"I wonder, Bruin," she said, "if my eyes show that I have been crying? What a nuisance if they do. I'd better run down to the Holy Well before I go into the house, and see if a good bathe will take the redness away. Come along, Bruin, my dog, come quickly."

Bruin trotted on in front of Bridget. He knew her moods well. He had comforted her before now in the summerhouse. No one but Bruin knew what bitter tears she had shed when she was first told she must go to England to school. Bruin had found her in the summerhouse then, and she had put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and then she had mopped her wet eyes and asked him as she did to-night if they showed signs of weeping, and also as to-night the dog and the girl had repaired to the Holy Well to wash the traces of tears away.

Bruin went on in front, now trotting quickly, and

never once troubling himself to look back. They soon reached the little well, which was covered with a small stone archway, under which the water lay dark and cool. Rare ferns dipped their leaves into the well, and some wild flowers twined themelves over the arch, which always, summer and winter, kept the sun from touching the water. It was a lonely spot not often frequented, for the well had the character of being haunted, and its waters were only supposed to act as a charm or cure on the O'Hara family. Bridget, therefore, stepped back with a momentary expression of surprise when she saw a woman bending down by the well in the act of filling a small glass bottle with some of its water.

She was a short, stout woman of between fifty and sixty. Her hair was nearly snow-white; her face was red and much weather-beaten; her small gray, twinkling eyes were somewhat sunk in her head; her nose was broad and *retroussé*, her mouth wide, showing splendid white teeth without a trace of decay about them.

The woman looked up when she heard a footstep approaching. Then, seeing Bridget, she dashed her glass bottle to the ground, and rushing up to the young girl, knelt at her feet, and clasped her hands ecstatically round her knees.

"Oh, Miss Biddy, Miss Biddy!" she exclaimed. "It's the heart-hunger I have been having for the sake of your purty face. Oh, Miss Biddy, my colleen, and didn't you miss poor Norah?"

"Of course I did, Norah," said Bridget. "I could not make out where you were. I asked about you over and over again, and they said you were away on

the hills, sheep-shearing. I did think it was odd, for you never used to shear the sheep, Norah."

"No," said Norah, "but I was that distraught with grief I thought maybe it 'ud cool me brain a bit. It's about Pat I'm in throuble, darlin'. It's all up with the boy and me! We has waited for years and years, and now there don't seem no chance of our being wedded. He's no better, Miss Biddy. The boy lies flat out on his back, and there aint no strength in him. Oh! me boy, me boy, that I thought to wed!"

"And where *is* Pat, Norah?" said Bridget. "I asked about him, too, and they said he had been moved up to a house on one of the hills, to get a little stronger air. I was quite pleased, for I know change of air is good for people after they get hurt. And why can't you be wed, Norah, even if Pat is hurt? I should think he'd want a wife to nurse him very badly now. Why can't you have a wedding while I'm at home, Norah macree?"

"Oh, me darlin'—light of me eyes that you are—but where's the good when the boy don't wish it himself? He said to me only yesterday, 'Me girl,' said he, 'it aint the will of the Vargen that you and me should wed this year, nor maybe next. We must put it off for a bit longer.' I'm close on sixty, Miss Bridget, and Pat is sixty-two, and it seems as if we might settle it now, but he don't see it. He says it was the will of the Vargen to lay him on his back and that there must be no coorting nor marrying until he's round on his feet again. I am about tired of waiting, Miss Bridget; for, though I aint to say old, I aint none so young nayther."

"But you have a lot of life left in you still, Norah,"

said Bridget. "I'll go and talk to Pat to-morrow, and we'll soon put things right. I was so dreadfully sorry to hear that he was hurt. And did you get my letter that I wrote to you from school?"

"To be sure, darlin'! and why wouldn't I? and it's framed up in Pat's cottage now, and we both looks at it after we has said our beads each night. It was a moighty foine letter, Miss Biddy! Pat and me said that you was getting a sight of larning at that foreign school."

"And did you get the money I sent you, Norah? I sent you and Pat two whole pounds in a postal order. I was so glad I had it to give you. Two pounds means a lot of money to an Irish boy and girl. Weren't you glad when you saw it, Norah? Didn't it make you and Pat almost forget about the accident and the pain?"

"Oh, Miss Bridget, alanna!" Norah's deep-set, good-natured, and yet cunning eyes were raised in almost fear to the young girl's face. "Miss Bridget, alanna, there worn't never a stiver in the letter. No, as sure as I'm standing here; not so much as a brass bawbee, let alone gold. Oh, alanna, someone must have shtole the beautiful money. Oh, to think of your sending it, and we never to get it; oh, worra, worra me!"

Bridget turned rather pale while Norah was speaking.

"I certainly sent you the money," she said. "Didn't I tell you so in the letter?"

Norah fumbled with her apron.

"Maybe you did, darlin'," she said evasively.

"But don't you *know?* It was principally to tell you about the money that I wrote."

"Well, you see, darlin'—truth is best. Nayther Pat

nor me can read, and so we framed the letter, but we don't know what's in it; only we knew from the foreign mark as it was from that baste of a school, and that it must be from you."

"I think I must run in to supper now, Norah; there are some visitors come to the Castle, and I'm awfully late as it is, and father may be vexed. I'll ride up on Wild Hawk to-morrow to see Pat, and you had better be there, and we'll find out where that money has got to. Good-night, Norah; but first tell me what you were doing at the Holy Well?"

"Don't you be angry with me, Miss Biddy. I thought maybe if I brought a bottle of the water to Pat, and he didn't know what it was, and he drank some as if it was ordiner water, that it would act as a love philter on him, and maybe he'd consint to our being married before many months is up. For I'm wearying to have the courtship over, and that's the truth I'm telling ye, Miss Bridget. I am awfully afraid as Pat has seen me gray hairs, and that they are turning the boy agen me, and that he'll be looking out for another girl."

"If he does I'll never speak to him again," said Bridget slowly. "You so faithful and so good! but now I must go in to supper, Norah."

Bridget ran scrambling and panting up to the house. Bruin kept her company step by step. He entered the large dining hall by her side, and walked with her to the head of the board, where she sat down in a vacant chair near her father's side.

"You're late, alanna," he said, turning his fine face slowly toward her with a courteous and yet reproachful glance.

She did not reply in words, but placed her hand on his knee for a moment.

The touch brought a smile to his face. He turned to talk to Janet, who, neatly dressed, and all traces of fatigue removed, was sitting at his other side.

Lady Kathleen was attending to Sophy's wants at the farther end of the table; but between them and the squire were several other visitors. These visitors were now so accustomed to paying long calls at Castle Mahun that they had come to look upon it as a second home. They were all Irish, and most of them rather old, and they one and all claimed relationship with Squire O'Hara. Nobody said much to them, but they ate heartily of the good viands with which the table was laden, and nodded and smiled with pleasure when the squire pressed them to eat more.

"Miss Macnamara, I *insist* on your having another glass of sherry!" the squire would thunder out; or, "Mr. Jonas O'Hagan, how is your lame foot this evening? and are you making free with the beef? It is meant to be eaten, remember; it is meant to be eaten."

Jonas O'Hagan, a very lean old man of close on seventy, would nod back to the squire, and help himself to junks of the good highly spiced beef in question. Miss Macnamara would simper and say:

"Well, squire, to *oblige* you then, I'll have just a *leetle* drop more sherry."

The business of eating, however, was too important for the squire to do much in the way of conversation.

Janet's small-talk—she thought herself an adept at small-talk—was kindly listened to, but not largely responded to.

Bridget whispered to herself, "I must really tell Janet another day that father must be left in peace to eat the one meal he really does eat in the twenty-four hours."

Bridget herself did not speak at all. She scarcely ate anything, but leaned back against her chair, one hand lying affectionately on Bruin's head. Anxious and troubled thoughts were filling her young mind. What had become of the two pounds she had given Janet to put into Norah's letter?

She felt startled and perplexed. It was an awful thing to harbor bad feelings toward a visitor. All Bridget's instincts rose up in revolt at the bare idea. She thought herself a dreadful girl for being obliged to rush away to the old summerhouse to cry; but bad as that was, what was it in comparison to the thoughts which now filled her mind? Could it be possible that Janet, sitting there exactly opposite to her, looking so neat, so pretty, so tranquil, could have stolen those two sovereigns? Could the girl who called herself Bridget's friend be a thief?

Oh, no, it was simply impossible.

Bridget had already discovered much meanness in Janet May. Janet, with her own small hand, had led Bridget O'Hara into crooked paths.

But all that, bad as it was, was nothing—nothing at all in Bridget's eyes, to the fact that she had stooped to be just a common thief.

"I thought that only very poor and starving people stole," thought the girl to herself, as she broke off a piece of griddle cake and put it to her lips. "Oh, I can't—I won't believe it of her. The postal order must have been put into the letter, and someone must have

taken it out before it reached Pat's hands. Perhaps the postal order is in the envelope all this time. When I ride over on Wild Hawk to-morrow to see Pat I'll ask him to show me the envelope. It would be a good plan if I took Janet with me. I can soon judge by her face whether she stole the money or not. Of course, if she did steal it, I must speak to her, but I can't do it on any part of the O'Hara estate. It would be quite too awful for the hostess to accuse her visitor of theft."

"Biddy, alanna—a penny for your thoughts," said the squire, tapping his daughter on her cheek.

"They are not worth even a farthing," she replied, coloring, however, and starting away from his keen glance.

"Then, if our young friends have done their supper, you'll maybe take them round the place a bit, colleen; they'll like to smell the sweet evening air, and to—— By the way, are you partial to dogs, Miss May; we have a few of them to show you if you are?"

"Oh, I like them immensely," said Janet. ("Horrid bores!" she murmured under her breath.) "I don't know much about them, of course," she added, raising her seemingly truthful eyes and fixing them on the old squire. "I had an uncle once; he's dead. I was very fond of him; he had a deerhound something like that one."

She nodded at Bruin as she spoke.

"Ah," said Mr. O'Hara, interested at once, "then you can appreciate the noblest sort of dog in the world. Come here, Bruin, my king, and let me introduce you to this young lady. This is a thoroughbred

Irish deerhound, Miss May; I wouldn't part with him for a hundred pounds in gold of the realm."

The stately dog, who had been crouching by Bridget's feet, rose slowly at his master's summons and approached Janet. He sniffed at the small hand which lay on her knee, evidently did not think much of either it or its owner, and returned to Biddy's side.

"You won't win Bruin in a hurry," said the squire. "I doubt if he could take to anyone who hasn't Irish blood; but for all that, although he won't love you, since I have formally introduced you to each other he'd rather die than see a hair of your head hurt. You are Bruin's guest now, and supposing you were in trouble of any sort during your visit to Castle Mahun, you'd find out the value of being under the dog's protection."

"Yes," said Janet, suppressing a little yawn. She rose from her seat as she spoke. "Shall we go out, Biddy?" she said. "Will you take Sophy and me round the place as your father has so kindly suggested?"

"Certainly," said Bridget; "we'll walk round the lake, and I'll show you the view from the top of the tower. There'll be a moon to-night, and that will make a fine silver path on the water. Are you coming too, Aunt Kathleen?"

"Presently, my love, after I have been round to look at Minerva and the pups."

The three girls left the hall in each other's company.

Sophy began to give expression to her feelings in little, weak, half-hysterical bursts of rapture. "Oh, what a delightful place!" she began, skipping by Bridget's side as she spoke. "This air does revive one so;

and *what* a view!" clasping her two hands together. "Miss O'Hara, how you are to be envied—you who live in the midst of this beauty. Oh, good Heavens, I can't stand all those dogs! I'm awfully afraid; I really am. Down, down! you *horrid* thing, you! Oh, please, save me; please, save me!" Sophy caught violent hold of Bridget's wrist, shrieked, danced, and dragged her dress away.

About a dozen dogs had suddenly rushed in a fury of ecstasy round the corner. Some of them had been chained all day, some shut up in their kennels. All were wild for their evening scamper, and indifferent in the first intoxication of liberty to the fact of whether they were caressing friends or strangers. They slobbered with their great mouths and leaped upon the girls, licking them all over in their joy.

The charge they made was really a severe one, and Sophy may easily have been forgiven for her want of courage.

Janet, who disliked the invasion of the dogs quite as much as her sister, favored that young person now with a withering glance; but Bridget spoke in a kind and reassuring tone.

"I'm so sorry they should have annoyed you," she said; "I might have known that you weren't accustomed to them. Daddy and I like them to jump about in this wild fashion, but I might have known that it wouldn't be pleasant to you. Down, this minute, dogs; I'm ashamed of you! Down, Mustard; down, Pepper; down, Oscar; down, Wild-Fire. Do you hear me? I'll use the whip to you if you don't obey."

Bridget's fine voice swelled on the evening breeze.

Each dog looked at her with a cowed and submissive eye; they ceased their raptures, and hung their drooping heads.

"To heel, every one of you!" she said.

They obeyed, and the girls entered the shady but steep walk which hung over the lake.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOLY WELL.

"YOU won't forget, girls," said Lady Kathleen the next morning when breakfast was over, "that Patrick and Gerald are coming to stay here to-day?"

"Hurrah!" said Bridget; "we'll have some shooting and fishing then."

"You can't shoot at this time of year," said the squire.

"I don't mean to shoot game, father," she replied. "I want to learn proper rifle shooting. What do you say, Janet; wouldn't you like to handle firearms?"

Janet hesitated for a moment; she saw disapproval on Lady Kathleen's face, and took her cue from her.

"I don't think I'm strong enough," she said. "Shooting with firearms seems just the one accomplishment which a girl *can't* manage; at least, I mean an ordinary girl."

Lady Kathleen clapped her hands.

"Hear to you, Mayflower," she said. "Right you are; I go with you, my dear. Firearms are downright dangerous things; and if I had my will, Biddy should never touch them. Do you hear me, squire?"

"Pooh!" said the squire; "what harm do they do? A girl ought to know how to defend herself. As to the danger, if she uses her common sense there is not any. I grant you that a foolish girl oughtn't to touch

firearms; but give me a sensible, strong-hearted colleen, and I'll provide that she handles a gun with the precision and care of the best sportsman in the land. Biddy here can bring down a bird on the wing with any fellow who comes to shoot in the autumn, and I don't suppose there is Biddy's match in the county for womanly graces either."

"You spoil her, Dennis," said Lady Kathleen. "It's well she's been sent to school to learn some of her failings, for she'd never find them out here. Not but that I'm as proud as Punch of her myself. For all that, however, I'd leave out the shooting; and I'm very much obliged to little Mayflower for upholding me."

"You haven't a wrist for a gun," said the squire, glancing at Janet's small hands. "Your vocations lie in another direction. You must favor me with a song some evening. I guess somehow by the look of your face that you are musical."

"I adore music," said Janet with enthusiasm.

"That's right. Can you do the 'Melodies'?"

"The 'Melodies'?"

"Yes; 'She is far from the Land,' and 'The Minstrel Boy,' and 'The Harp that once through Tara's Halls'; but it isn't likely you can touch *that*. It requires an Irish girl born and bred, with her fingers touching the strings of an Irish harp, and her soul in her eyes, and her heart breaking through the beautiful birdlike voice of her, to give that 'Melody' properly. We'll have it to-night, Biddy, you and I. We'll get the harp brought out on the terrace, and when the moon is up we'll have the dogs lying about, and we'll sing it; you and I."

"Dear, dear, squire," said Lady Kathleen, "if you and Biddy sing 'The Harp that once through Tara's

Halls' as you *can* sing it, you'll give us all the creeps! Why, it seems to be a sort of wail when you two do it. I see the forsaken hall, and the knights, and the chieftains, and the fair ladies! Oh, it's melting, *melting!* You must provide yourselves with plenty of handkerchiefs, Mayflower and Sophy, if we are going to have that sort of entertainment. But here comes the post-bag; I wonder if there's anything for me."

The door of the hall was swung open at the farther end, and a man of about thirty, with bare feet, and dressed in a rough fustian suit, walked up the room, and deposited the thick leather bag by the squire's side.

"Now what did you come in for, Jonas?" he asked. "Weren't any of the other servants about?"

"I couldn't help meself, your honor," said Jonas, pulling his front lock of hair, and looking sheepishly and yet affectionately down the long table. "I was hungering for a sight of Miss Biddy. I hadn't clapped eyes on her sence she came back, and I jest ran foul of them varmints, and made free of the hall. Begging your honor's parding, I hope there's no harm done."

"No, Jonas, not any. Make your bob to Miss Biddy now, and go."

The man bowed low, flashed up two eyes of devotion to the girl's face, and scampered in a shambling kind of way out of the room.

"Good soul, capital soul, that," said the squire, nodding to Janet.

"He seems very devoted," she replied, lowering her eyes to conceal her true feelings.

The squire proceeded to unlock the letter-bag and dispense its contents. Most of the letters were for

himself, but there was one thick inclosure for Lady Kathleen.

Janet sprang up to take it to her. As she did so she recognized the handwriting and the postmark. The letter came from Eastcliff, and was from Mrs. Freeman.

Janet felt her heart beat heavily. She felt no doubt whatever that this letter, so thick in substance and so important in appearance, contained an account of poor Biddy's delinquencies.

Lady Kathleen received it, and laid it by her plate.

"Who's your correspondent, Kathleen?" asked the squire, from the other end of the table. It was one of his small weaknesses to be intensely curious about letters.

Lady Kathleen raised the letter and examined the writing.

"It's from Eastcliff," she said, "from Mrs. Freeman; I know by the way she flourishes her t's. The letter is from Mrs. Freeman," she repeated, raising her voice. "A thick letter, with an account, no doubt, of our Biddy's progress."

Bridget, who was standing by her father's side, turned suddenly pale. Her hand, which rested on his shoulder, slightly trembled; a sick fear, which she had thought dead, came over her with renewed force. She had forgotten the possibility of Mrs. Freeman writing an account of her wrong-doings to Lady Kathleen. Now she felt a sudden wild terror, something like a bird caught for the first time in the fowler's net.

Squire O'Hara felt her hand tremble. This father and daughter were so truly one that her lightest moods, her most passing emotions were instantly perceived by him.

"You are all in a fuss, colleen," he said, looking back at her; "but if there is a bit of praise in the letter, why shouldn't we hear it? You open it, and read it aloud to us, Kathleen. You'll be glad to hear what my daughter has done at school, Miss Macnamara?"

"Proud, squire, proud," retorted the old lady, cracking the top off another egg as she spoke.

"Please, father, I'd rather the letter wasn't read aloud. I don't think it is all praise," whispered Biddy in his ear.

The Squire's hawk-like face took a troubled glance for a quarter of a minute. He looked into Biddy's eyes and took his cue.

No one else had heard her low, passionate whisper.

"After all," he said, "the colleen has a fair share of womanly modesty, and I for one respect her for it. She can handle a gun with any man among us, but she can't hear herself praised to her face. All right, colleen, you shan't be. We'll keep over the letter for the present, if you please, Kathleen."

"That's as you please, Dennis. For my part, I expect it's just the school bills, and there is no hurry about them. I want to go and speak to Molly Fitzgerald about preserving the late raspberries, so I shan't read the letter at all at present."

She slipped it into her pocket, and, rising from the table, set the example to the others to follow her.

The three girls went out on the terrace. Janet walked by Bridget's side, and Sophy ran on in front.

"I can't believe," said Bridget, looking at Sophy, "that your sister is older than you. She has quite the ways and manners of a very young girl, whereas you——"

"Thank you," said Janet. "I know quite well what you mean, Biddy. I know I'm not young for my age. I needn't pretend when I am with you, Biddy," she continued, speaking with a sudden emphasis; "you wouldn't be young, either, if you had always had to lead my life. I have had to do for myself, and for Sophy, too, since I was ever so little. I have had to plot, and to plan, and contrive. I never had an easy life. Perhaps, if I had had the same chances as other girls, I might have been different."

"I wish you would always talk like that," said Bridget, an expression of real friendliness coming into her face. "If you would always talk as you are doing now—I mean in that true tone—I—I could *bear* you, Janet."

"Oh, I know what your feelings are well enough," said Janet. "I am not so blind as you imagine. I know you hate having me here, and that if it wasn't for—for *something* that happened at school you wouldn't tolerate my presence for an hour. But you see something did happen at school; something that you don't want to be known; and you have got to tolerate me; do you hear?"

"You're mistaken in supposing that I would be rude to you now you have come," said Bridget. "I don't think I should have invited you; I didn't invite you. My aunt didn't even tell me that she had done so. She thought we were friends, and that she was giving me a nice surprise when she told me that you were coming."

"I took care that you didn't know," said Janet in a low tone, and with a short little laugh. "You don't suppose Lady Kathleen would have thought of the

nice little surprise by herself? It was I who managed everything; the surprise, and the gay jolly time we are to spend at the Castle, and all."

"You are clever," said Bridget, "but I don't think I envy you your kind of cleverness. All the same, now that you are here you are my visitor, and I shall do what I can to give you a good time."

"Thanks," said Janet, "I dare say I can manage that for myself. By the way, did you notice that a letter has come from Eastcliff?"

"From Mrs. Freeman; yes, what of that?"

"There is no good in your saying 'What of that?' so calmly with your lips, Bridget, when your heart is full of the most abject terror. Didn't I see how your face changed color this morning when you saw the letter, and didn't I notice you when you whispered something to your father? You are very, very sorry that letter has come. It would be very terrible to you—very terrible for you, if its contents were known."

Sophy was still flitting on in front. The sunshine was bathing the sloping lawns, and the dark forest trees, and the smooth bosom of Lake Crena. It seemed to Bridget for the first time in her young life that sunshine, even when it fell upon Irish land, was a mockery and a delusion.

"I do not want my father to know," she said, with a break in her voice. "It would kill me if he knew. You see what he is, Janet, the soul of all that is noble and honorable. Oh, it would kill me if he knew what I have done; and I think it would kill him also. O Janet, why did you get me into such an awful scrape?"

"You didn't think it so very awful when you were knowing all your lessons, and getting praise from every-

one, and mounting to the head of your class. It seemed all right to you then, and you never blamed me at all; but now that the dark side of the picture comes, and you are in danger of discovery, you see your conduct in a different light. I have no patience with you. You have the appearance of being a very brave girl; in reality you are a coward."

"No one ever said that to me before," said Bridget, clenching her hand, her eyes flashing.

"Well, I say it now; it's very good for the petted, and the courted, and the adored, to listen to unvarnished truths now and then. Oh, so you have come back, Sophy. Yes, those are pretty flowers, but perhaps Miss O'Hara doesn't wish you to pick her flowers."

"Not wish her to pick the flowers," said Bridget, "and she a visitor! What nonsense! Oh, you English don't at all know our Irish ways."

"I think you have quite lovely ways," said Sophy. "I never felt so happy in my life. I never, never was in such a beautiful place, and I never came across such truly kind people."

"Well, run on then," said Janet, "and pick some more of the flowers."

"There's one of those awful jaunting cars coming up the avenue," said Sophy.

"Then the boys have come," exclaimed Bridget. "I must fly to them."

She rushed away, putting wings to her feet, and the two May girls were left standing together. Janet was absorbed in a brown study. Sophy's eager eyes followed the car as it ascended the steep and winding avenue.

"I wonder if we'll have any fun with the boys," she

said, "and who are the boys? I hope they are grown up."

"You can make yourself easy on that score," said Janet, "they are only lads—schoolboys. They live on the O'Mahoney estate, about eighteen miles away. Their names are Patrick and Gerald, and I expect they are about as raw and uninteresting as those sort of wild Irish can be. Now, Sophy, do continue your pretty kittenish employment; skip about and pick some more flowers."

"I think I will be kittenish enough to run down the avenue and see what the boys are really like," said Sophy. "I'll soon know whether there is any fun to be got out of them."

She ran off as she spoke, and Janet found herself alone.

She stood still for a minute, irresolute and nervous. The arrival of the letter by that morning's post had given her great uneasiness. She was a young person of very calm judgment and ready resource, but as matters now stood she could not see her own way. The next step was invisible to her, and such a state of things was torture to a nature like hers. Oh, if only she could secure that letter, then how splendid would be her position. Bridget would be absolutely in her power. She could do with this erratic and strange girl just what she pleased.

Four gay young voices were heard approaching, some dogs were yelping and gamboling about, boyish tones rose high on the breeze, followed by the light sound of girlish laughter.

"Talk of Bridget really feeling anything!" murmured Janet; "why, that girl is all froth."

She felt that she could not meet the gay young folks just now, and ran round a shady path which led to the back of the house; here she found herself in full view of a great yard, into which the kitchen premises opened. The yard was well peopled with barefooted men, and barefooted girls and women. Some pigs were scratching, rolling about, and disporting themselves, after their amiable fashion, in a distant corner. Some barn-door fowls and a young brood of turkeys were making a commotion and rushing after a thickly set girl, who was feeding them with barley; quantities of yellow goslings and downy ducklings were to be seen making for a muddy looking pond. Some gentle looking cows were lowing in their sheds. The cart horses were being taken out for the day's work.

It was a gay and picturesque scene, and Janet, anxious as she felt, could not help standing still for a moment to view it.

"And now, where are you going, Mayflower? and why aren't you with the others?" exclaimed a gay voice.

Janet hastily turned her head, and saw Lady Kathleen, with her rich, trailing silk dress turned well up over her petticoat, a gayly colored cotton handkerchief tied over her head, and a big basket in her hand.

"Why aren't you with the others, Mayflower?" she repeated. "Are they bad-hearted enough, and have they bad taste enough, not to want you, my little mavourneen?"

"I don't know, Lady Kathleen," said Janet, raising eyes which anxiety had rendered pathetic. "I don't know that I am really much missed; some people

whom Bridget speaks of as 'the boys' have just arrived, and she——"

"Oh, mercy!" interrupted Lady Kathleen, "and so the lads have come. I must go and talk to them as soon as ever I have helped cook a bit with the raspberries. We are going in for a grand preserving to-day, and cook and I have our hands full. Would you like to come along and give us a bit of assistance, Mayflower!"

"You may be sure I would," said Janet.

"Well, come then," said Lady Kathleen. "You can eat while you pick. I can tell you that the Castle Mahun raspberries are worth eating; why, they are as large as a cook's thimble, each of them; I don't mean a lady's thimble, but a cook's; and that's no offense to you, Molly Malone."

Molly Malone, who resembled a thick, short sack in figure, spread out her broad hands and grinned from ear to ear.

"Why, then, you must be always cracking your jokes, me lady," she said, "and fine I likes to hear you; and it's the beautiful, hondsome lady you is."

"Get out with you, Molly," said Lady Kathleen; "don't you come over me with your blarney. Now, then, here we are. Isn't it a splendid, great, big patch of berries, Mayflower?"

"I never saw raspberries growing before," said Janet; "how pretty they look!"

"They look even prettier when they are turned into rich red jam. Now, then, we must all set to work. Put your basket here, Molly, and run and fetch us some cabbage leaves; we'll each have a cabbage leaf to fill with berries, and when our leaves are full we'll pop

"WHILE JANET WAS FILLING ONE."—*p.* 255.

the berries into the big basket. Oh, bother those brambles, they are tearing and spoiling my dress; I wish I hadn't it on. It is quite a good silk, and I know it will get both stained and torn, but when the notion came to me to help Molly Malone with the preserving, I really could not be worried changing it."

Janet made no remark, and Lady Kathleen quickly busied herself with the raspberry briars. She was a very expert picker, and filled two or three leaves with the luscious, ripe fruit while Janet was filling one.

"Why, my dear," she said, "what are you about? Those small fingers of yours are all thumbs. Who'd have believed it? Oh! and you must only pick the ripe fruit; the fruit that almost comes away when you look at it. Let me show you; there, that's better. Now you have gone and scratched your hand, poor mite; it's plain to be seen you have no Irish blood in you."

Janet looked at her small wounded hand with a dismal face.

"As I said a minute ago, I never saw raspberries growing before," she said.

"You needn't remark that to us, my love; your way of picking them proves your ignorance. Now, I tell you what you shall do for me. This silk skirt that I have on is no end of a bother. I'll just slip it off; there'll be no one to see me in my petticoat, and you can run with it to the house and bring back a brown holland skirt which you'll find in my wardrobe. Run straight to the house with the skirt, Janet, and I'll be everlastingly obliged to you. Anyone will show you my bedroom; it is at the end of the Ghost's Corridor. Run, child, run; put wings to your feet. Well, you

are a good-natured little thing; your eyes quite sparkle with delight."

"I am very glad to oblige you, Lady Kathleen," said Janet. Her eyelashes drooped over her bright eyes as she spoke. Lady Kathleen flung the rich silk skirt carelessly over her arm, and she ran off.

"Be sure you bring me the brown holland, my dear, with the large fruit stain in front; there are two of them in the wardrobe, and I want the one with the fruit stain," shouted the good lady after her.

Janet called back that she would remember, and, running faster, was soon lost to view.

When she could no longer get even a peep at Lady Kathleen she stood still, and, slipping her hand into the pocket of the rich silk skirt, took out the thick letter with the Eastcliff postmark on it. This was transferred to her own pocket; then, going on to the house, she found Lady Kathleen's bedroom, took down the holland skirt with the stain on it, and was back again with the good lady after an absence of not more than ten minutes.

"That's right, my love, that's right," said Lady Kathleen; "you are like that dear, little, old Greek god, Mercury, for swiftness and expedition; and now, as you don't seem to care to pick raspberries, you can go and join your young friends. They are safe to go on the lake this morning, and I have no doubt you'll enjoy a row."

"Oh, thank you," said Janet, "I love the water."

She turned away, and soon found herself outside the great kitchen garden and walking down the steep path which led directly to the lake. She heard gay voices in the distance, and was willing enough to join the young party now. Her heart felt as light as a feather.

It was delicious to know that she had, by one dexterous stroke, saved Bridget, and, at the same time, put her into her power.

"I am made for life," whispered Janet, as she stepped along. "Who would have thought half an hour ago that such a lucky chance was to be mine? I know perfectly well that Biddy hates me, but she would rather conceal her hatred all her life than let her father know the contents of the letter which I have in my pocket. I am not the least afraid of Lady Kathleen suspecting me of having taken it. She is so erratic and careless herself that she has probably quite forgotten that she ever put Mrs. Freeman's letter into her pocket. Oh! I am as safe as safe can be, and as happy also. I cannot stay long in this wild, outlandish sort of place, but it is very well for a short time; and as I mean to make plenty of use of Lady Kathleen in the future, I may as well cultivate her all I can now. It would be rather a nice arrangement if poor little Sophy were made Bridget's companion by and by; of course I can make any terms with Bridget that I like, as I shall always keep the letter as a rod in pickle to hold over her devoted head. Bridget will be so much afraid of me that she will do exactly what I please, and it would be nice for Sophy to live with her.

"As to myself, I mean to go to Paris with Lady Kathleen. I shall go to Paris and have a really gay and fine time; I mean to go, and I mean also to wear some of the lovely Parisian dresses which are showered in such profusion on that tiresome, stupid Biddy, which she can't appreciate, and won't appreciate, but which I should make a fine harvest out of. Oh, yes! oh, yes! my future is secure. Who would have thought that in

one little short half hour Dame Fortune would have so completely turned her wheel?"

Janet skipped and ran down the winding path. She presently came to the neighborhood of the Holy Well. She knew nothing about the well. It had no history whatever to her; but as she felt hot and thirsty, and a little wooden cup was hanging by a chain to the arched stone roof, and the water looked dark and clear and cool beneath, she stooped, intending to take a long draught of the cold water. Going close to the well, she held up her dress, and walked on the tips of her dainty shoes. Bending forward, and stretching out her hand, she was about to take the little wooden cup from its hook, and to dip it into the well, in order to get a good draught of the delicious water, when a voice suddenly said to her:

"Why then, missy, if you drink that wather, you that don't belong to the quality what lives at the big house, you'll have no luck all the rest of your born days."

The sound of this voice was so unexpected that Janet stepped back, startled.

A thickly set woman, with white hair, was standing near the well.

"That wather is only for the O'Haras," she said. "They and their kinsfolk can drink it, and it brings them a power of luck, but if so be as strangers so much as wets their lips with it, why, a curse enters into their bones with every dhrop they takes. That's thrue as I am standing here, miss, and you had better be warned. Wance the curse enters into you, you dwindles and dwindles till you dhrops out of sight entirely."

Janet gave a mocking laugh.

"Oh, you *are* a silly old woman," she exclaimed.

"And do you really think that I am going to be taken in by nonsense of that sort? I'll show you now how much I believe you."

She filled the wooden cup to the brim, then, raising it to her lips, took a long, deep draught.

"Am I beginning to dwindle already?" she asked, dropping a courtesy to the angry looking Irishwoman. Without waiting for a reply she turned on her heel, and ran down the slope.

The woman followed her retreating form with flashing eyes.

"I can't abide her!" she muttered. "She's an Englisher, and I can't abide them Englishers. I hope she will dwindle and dwindle. Oh! me boy, me boy! you as was a follower of the family—you and your forbears before you—you ought to get good from this holy wather, and, oh! if it would turn your heart to the breaking heart of your Norah, how happy I'd be."

CHAPTER XXII.

WILD HAWK.

THE boys Patrick and Gerald were jolly, good-humored, handsome lads, with not a scrap of affectation, but with rather more than the average amount of boy mischief in their compositions. They were quite inclined to be friendly with the two English girls whom they found established at Castle Mahun, but that fact would by no means prevent their taking a rise out of them at the first opportunity which offered.

Sophy was full of little nervous terrors. She shrank back when they offered to help her into the boat; she uttered a succession of little shrieks as she was conveyed to her seat in the stern. Patrick winked at Gerald when she did this, and they both made a mental resolution to cajole the unfortunate Sophy into the boat some day when they could have her all to themselves. They would not endanger her life on that occasion, but unquestionably they would give her an exciting time.

They meant to play some pranks on Sophy; but at the same time they regarded the pretty, helpless, nervous little English girl with a certain chivalrous good nature, which by no means animated the feelings with which they looked at Janet.

Janet was not at all to their taste. She had a supercilious manner toward them, which was most

riling. They were shrewd enough to guess, too, that Bridget, notwithstanding her gentleness and politeness, in her heart of hearts could not bear Janet. As Patrick and Gerald would both of them have almost died for their cousin Bridget, the knowledge that she was not fond of Janet was likely to give that young lady some unpleasant experiences in the future.

Although Bridget was in apparently gay spirits during the morning of this day, she was in her heart of hearts extremely anxious and unhappy. The fatal letter had arrived; the story of her deceit and underhand ways would soon be known to her father and to Aunt Kathleen. Aunt Kathleen might, and probably would, quickly forgive her; but Squire O'Hara, although he forgave, would, at least, never forget. Forever and forever, all through the rest of his days, the shadow of Bridget's dishonor would cloud his eyes, and keep back the old gay and heart-whole smile from his lips. He would love her, and pity her, and be sweet to her, but never again would she be as the old Biddy to him. Now he looked upon her as a pearl without a flaw, as the best of all created beings; in the future there would be a dimness over her luster.

While the poor young girl was laughing with her cousins, and trying to make her visitors happy, these thoughts darkened and filled her mind. She had also another care.

She must discover if Janet had really taken the two pounds. It would be too awful if she were really proved to be nothing better than a common thief. Bridget intended to ask Janet to accompany her to Pat's cottage on the hills that afternoon. The postal

order might all the time be safely tucked away in the envelope of the unread letter. If so, all would be well; but if, on the other hand, it was nowhere to be found, Bridget felt sure that she could, to a great extent, read the truth in Janet's face. It would be impossible for her to speak to Janet on the subject while she was in her father's house, or even in any part of the grounds; but out on the hills, away from the O'Hara estate, she might tell her plainly what she thought of her conduct.

When the early dinner was over, Bridget called Janet aside and spoke to her.

"I am going to ride on my pony Wild Hawk," she said. "I am going to see some poor people who live up in the hills. I don't want the boys to come, but they can amuse Sophy if you like to ride with me, Janet. You told me once at school that you were very fond of riding."

"That is true," replied Janet. "I used to ride in Hyde Park when I was a very little girl, but that, of course, is some years ago."

"Oh, that doesn't matter, the knowledge will remain with you. We have a very nice, quiet lady's horse, called Miss Nelly, in the stables; you shall ride her."

"But I haven't a habit," said Janet.

"I have a nice little one which I have quite outgrown. Come to my room, and let me try if it will fit you; I am almost sure it will."

"All right," replied Janet; "I should enjoy a ride very much."

She hoped that during this ride she would be able to tell Bridget that she had secured the obnoxious

letter, and the first step of putting the young girl completely in her power would begin.

She went with Miss O'Hara to her bedroom—an enormous room furnished with oak, and strewn all over with costly knickknacks and ornaments. The three large windows commanded an extensive view. They were wide open, and Bridget when she entered the room went straight up to the center one, and, clasping her hands, said in a low voice of passion:

"How I love you!"

"What do you love, Bridget?" asked Janet.

"My land—my Ireland," she said. "Oh, you can't understand. Please help me to open this long drawer. I'll soon find your habit."

Janet assisted her with a will; the heavy drawer was tugged open, and a neat dark blue habit, braided with silver, was pulled into view.

Janet slipped it on, and found that it fitted her perfectly.

"Take it to your room," said Bridget. "I am very glad it fits you; you may want it many times while you are here."

"Yes, and I may want to take it away with me, too," murmured Janet in a whisper to herself.

She went to her room, put on the dark, prettily made habit, and looked at herself with much satisfaction in the glass. With a little arrangement, Bridget's childish habit fitted Janet's neat figure like a glove. She had never looked better than she did at this moment. The rather severe dress gave her a certain almost distinguished appearance. She ran downstairs in high spirits. Bridget was standing in

the hall, and the squire was also present to help the two girls to mount their horses. He looked with pleasure at Janet, and said in a hearty tone:

"I am very glad that you can ride, my little girl. It isn't often that Bridget gets anyone at all her equal in horsemanship to accompany her."

"Oh, father, you make a great mistake," exclaimed Bridget; "I have you."

"What's an old boy worth to a young colleen," he replied; but he smiled at her with fond affection, and the horses being led up by a shabbily dressed groom, Bridget sprang lightly into her seat on Wild Hawk's back.

He was a thoroughbred little Arab, with an eye of fire, a sensitive mouth, and a jet-black shining skin. Miss Nelly was a pretty roan-colored horse, but not a thoroughbred like Wild Hawk.

"You'll be thoroughly safe on Miss Nelly," said the squire to Janet. "Yes, that's right, now take the reins, so! You had better not use the whip, but here is one in case you happen to require it."

Janet nodded, smiled, and cantered after Bridget down the avenue.

Her heart was beating fast. She was not exactly nervous, but as her riding in old times had been of the slightest and most superficial kind, she was truly thankful to find that Miss Nelly was gentle in temperament, and not thoroughbred, if to be thoroughbred meant starting at every shadow, and turning eyes like dark jewels to look at the smallest obstruction that appeared on the road.

"It's all right," said Bridget, noticing the uneasiness in Janet's face. "Wild Hawk is a bit fresh,

the beauty, but he'll quiet down and go easily enough after I have taken it out of him a bit."

"What do you mean by 'taking it out of him,' Bridget? He does not seem to care much for this easy sort of trot, and he really does start so that he is making Miss Nelly quite nervous."

"Substitute Miss Janet for Miss Nelly," said Bridget, with a saucy curl of her lips, "and you will get nearer to the truth. As to its being taken out of the horse, you don't call this little easy amble anything? Wait until we get on to the breezy hill, and then you will see what kind of pranks Wild Hawk and I will play together."

"But nowhere near Miss Nelly, I hope," said Janet.

"Nowhere near Miss Nelly?" replied Bridget. "Dear me, Janet, you don't suppose I am taking you out like this to lead you into any sort of danger? I am not mean enough for that."

"Some girls would be mean enough," said Janet, almost in a whisper.

"Would they? Not the sort of girls I would have anything to do with. Now, here we are on the top of the hill. Do you see these acres and acres of common land which surround us, and do you notice that small cottage or hovel which looks something like a speck in the far distance? It is in that hovel that the poor people live whom I am going to see. Now I mean to ride for that hovel straight as an arrow from a bow. There are fences and sunk ditches in the way, but Wild Hawk and I care for none of these things. You, my dear Janet, will follow this little stony path on Miss Nelly's back; it is a considerable round to the hovel over there on

the horizon, but it is very safe, and you can amble along as slowly as you please. I shall be at the cottage nearly half an hour before you get to it, but what matter? Now then, Wild Hawk, cheer up, my king; go like the wind, or like the bird after whom you are named, my darling."

Bridget rode on a few paces in front of Janet; then she suddenly bent forward, until her lips nearly touched Wild Hawk's arched neck. Janet thought that the wild Irish girl had whispered a word to the wild horse; the next moment the two were seen flying through space together. The horse seemed to put wings to his feet, his slender feet scarcely touched the ground. With the lightness and sureness of a bird he cleared the fences which came in his way. Janet could not help drawing in her breath with a deep sigh—half of envy, half of admiration.

"How splendid Bridget O'Hara is," she murmured; "such a figure, such a face, such a bold, brave spirit! There is something about her which, if the Fates were at all fair, even I could love. But they are not fair," continued Janet, an angry flush filling her cheeks; "they have given her too much, and me too little. I must help myself out of her abundance, and there's no way of doing it but by humbling her."

So Janet rode gently along the stony path, and in the course of time found herself drawing in her reins by the low mud hovel, which looked to her scarcely like a human habitation.

The moment she appeared in sight two lean dogs of the cur species came out and barked vociferously. Miss Nelly was, however, accustomed to the barking of dogs, and did not take any notice. At the

same instant a stoutly built, gray-headed woman rushed out of the cabin and helped her to alight.

Janet felt a slight sense of discomfort when she recognized in this woman the person who had warned her not to drink the water of the Holy Well. It was not in her nature, however, to show her discomfort, except by an extra degree of pertness.

"How do you do?" she said, nodding to the woman, and springing to the ground as she spoke. "I have not begun to dwindle yet, you see."

"Why, me dear, it is to be hoped not," answered Norah, in quick retort; "for, faix! then, you are so small already that if you grow any less there'll be nothing for the eye to catch hould of. But come into the cottage, missy; Miss Biddy is sitting by Pat, and comforting the boy a bit with her purty talk."

"Pat!" whispered Janet to herself. Her feeling of discomfort did not grow less. The name of Pat seemed in some queer way familiar, but it did not occur to her to connect it with the friends about whom Bridget had cried at Mulberry Court.

She had to stoop her head to enter the hovel, and could not help looking round the dirty little place with disgust.

"I have come, Biddy," she exclaimed. "I don't suppose you want to stay long; this cottage is very, very close. I don't care to stop here myself, but I can walk about while you are talking to your friends."

"Oh, pray, don't!" said Bridget, springing to her feet; "I want to introduce you to Pat. Come here, please!" She seized Janet's small wrist, and pulled her forward. "Mr. Patrick Donovan—Miss Janet May. This man, Janet, whom I have introduced to you

as Patrick Donovan, is one of my very dearest friends."

"At your sarvice, miss," said Pat, blushing a fiery red, and pulling his forelock awkwardly with one big, rather dirty hand.

He was a powerfully built man, with great shoulders, long legs, and grisly hair curling round his chin and on his head. His eyes were dark and deep-set; capable of ferocity, but capable also of the affectionate devotion which characterizes the noblest sort of dog. He looked askance at Janet, read the contempt in her glance, and turned to look at Bridget with a humble, respectful, but adoring glance.

Norah had also entered the room; she was standing looking alternately from Pat to Biddy. She was as plain as Patrick was the reverse, but the love-light in her eyes, as she glanced at her suffering hero, would have redeemed and rendered beautiful a far uglier face than hers.

"It's all right then, Pat," said Bridget, "we'll have the wedding next week; you'll be fit to be moved then, and you shall come down from the hills on a litter, and the wedding shall be at Castle Mahun, and the feast shall be in our kitchen, and I'll give you your bride my own self."

"Oh, Miss Biddy, long life to ye; the Heavens above presarve ye," murmured poor Norah, in a voice of ecstasy. "Oh, me boy, me boy, to think as in the long last we'll be wed!"

"It's all right, Norah," said Pat, touching her forehead for a moment with his big hand; "don't make a fuss, colleen, before the quality. Keep yourself to yourself when there's strangers looking on."

"Who talks of Miss Biddy as a stranger?" said Norah, with fierce passion.

"No one," said Pat; "but there's the young Englisher lady; may the God above bless her, if she's a friend of yours though, Miss Biddy."

Bridget made no response to this. She rose and offered her chair to Janet.

"Sit, Janet," she exclaimed; "there's a little matter I want to talk over before we leave the cottage. You remember my telling you at Mulberry Court about Pat's accident; you remember how troubled I was. I wrote a letter to Pat and Norah, and you posted it. I gave you two sovereigns to get a postal order to put into the letter. Now, a very queer thing has happened. The letter arrived quite safely; here is the letter; you see how neatly Pat has framed it; but the postal order never arrived."

"That's thrue, Miss Biddy," exclaimed Norah. "Here's all as was in the letter, as sure as I'm standing up in my stockinged feet this minute."

"I put the postal order in," said Janet, in a careless voice; "what else should I do? I suppose your postmen here aren't honest."

"Why then, miss, that's a bould thing to say of Mike Carthy," answered Pat, in a low, angry voice, which resembled a growl.

"I thought you might be able to throw some light on the matter," said Bridget, "but it seems you cannot. We must be going home now, so I shall have to say good-by, Pat. Norah, you can come down to the Castle for some fresh eggs to-morrow, and I'll get Molly Malone to make up a basket of all sorts of good things to strengthen Pat for his wedding."

"You won't forget a wee dhrop of the crathur, lady?" muttered the giant, looking up into Biddy's face.

"No, no, that I won't, Pat, my poor fellow."

Bridget wrung her retainer's hand, and a moment or two later she and Janet were on their homeward way.

"Now, look here," said Bridget, when the girls had gone a little distance in almost unbroken silence; "I wish to say something; I shan't talk about it when we get home, but out here we are both on equal ground, and I can talk my mind freely and fully. I watched your face when we were in that little cottage, Janet, and I am quite certain you know something about those two sovereigns which I gave you to post to Pat Donovan."

"What if I do?" retorted Janet.

"You have got to tell me the truth," answered Bridget. "If what I suspect is the case, I shall not ask Aunt Kathleen to do anything to shorten your stay at Castle Mahun; I shall not breathe the knowledge that is given to me, to a soul in the house; but I myself will never speak to you again. A few bare civilities it will be necessary for me to offer, but beyond this I shall never address you. My silence will not be noticed, for everyone else will be kind; but I—I tell you plainly that, if what I suspect is true, I will *not* associate with you."

"Will you kindly tell me your suspicions?" replied Janet.

"I think—oh! it's an awful thing to say—I think that you took those two sovereigns and put them into your own pocket."

"And because of that, supposing it to be true, you will not speak to me?"

"I will not!"

"But I tell you that you will; you will speak to me, and pet me, and fawn on me, even though you regard me as a thief—there!"

"I won't, Janet; I am a proud Irish girl, and I can't."

"You are a very cowardly, mean Irish girl. You are not a bit the sort of creature that people imagine you to be!" replied Janet, who was now almost overcome by the passion which choked her. "You talk of speaking quite openly and frankly, because we are on the hills together. I, too, will give you a piece of my mind out here, with no one to listen to us."

"No one to listen to us!" said Bridget, her face growing pale; "oh, you forget, you must forget, there is Nature herself, her voice in the breeze, and in the twitter of the birds, and her face looking up at us from the earth, and her smile looking down at us from the sky. I should be awfully afraid to tell a lie out here, alone with Nature."

"My dear, I have no intention of telling any lies to you. I do breathe tarradillies now and then; I am not too proud to confess it. You would, too, if you were situated like me; but I don't waste them on people whom it is necessary to be honest with. I did keep that money; it was far more useful to me than it would be to that Patrick of yours. He didn't want it, and I did. You were full of pity for him, but you had not a scrap of pity to bestow on me, so I had to pity myself, and I did so by taking your money. I found it most useful. But for it, Sophy and I would not now be at Castle Mahun. I hoped what I did would never be discovered. Well, it has been, but it does not greatly matter, as you are the one to make the discovery."

"What do you mean? what can you mean?"

"What I say; you can send me to prison, of course, and ruin me for life, but you won't, for your own sake. See what I have done to save you!"

Janet put her hand into her pocket and pulled out the Eastcliff letter.

She held it aloft, and laughed in her companion's face.

"You won't be hard on me now, Biddy," she said, in the tones of one addressing an equal. "If I have been a thief—it is an ugly word, and there is no use in speaking it again; if I have been a thief, you, too, have done something which you are ashamed of. That something has been discovered at Mulberry Court, and this letter contains a full account of it. Your aunt, Lady Kathleen, was to read it first, and then, of course, in the ordinary course, your father would have heard the whole disgraceful story. Little as you think of me, I have saved you from disgrace, Biddy, my love. You are fond of Nature, but Nature won't tell tales. If you will promise to respect the secret you have discovered about me, I will respect your secret; I will tear up this letter, here on this wild hilltop, and Nature shall bury the tell-tale pieces as she wills and where she likes. Here is the letter, Biddy; I have saved you. Ought you not to be obliged to me?"

A queer change came over Bridget while Janet was speaking; a certain nobleness seemed to go out of her figure; she looked less like part of Wild Hawk than she had done five minutes ago; the color receded from her cheeks; her eyes lost their proud fire, her lips their proud smile.

"How did you manage to get that letter?" she whispered in a low tone.

"I am not going to tell you, my darling; I have got it, and that ought to be enough for you. Now, are we each to respect the secret of the other, or not?"

"Oh, I don't know; it seems so dreadful."

"It is rather dreadful, dear; I admit that. If you go and tell your father and Lady Kathleen about me, and about what I have just confessed to you, I shall have a very uncomfortable time. I shall be thoroughly and completely ruined, but in my ruin I shall pull you down too, Bridget, from the pedestal which you now occupy. It would be easy for me to put this letter back where Lady Kathleen will be able to lay her hands on it; in that case she will read it, and your father will know everything. I shall be ruined, and you will have a very unpleasant time. You must choose now what you will do; shall we both go on appearing what we are not? I, a modest, good-natured little girl, who never did an underhand trick in my life, and you—you, Biddy, the soul, the essence of what an Irishman calls honor."

"Oh, don't," said Bridget, "you make my eyes burn; you make me feel so small and wicked. Janet, why do you tempt me so awfully? Janet, I wish—I wish that I had never, never known you."

"My dear, I can't echo your wish. I am glad that I have met you, for you can be very useful to me; but now you have got to choose; shall I put the letter back in Lady Kathleen's room, or shall I tear it up?"

"But, even if you do tear it up," said Bridget, "the evil day is only delayed. When my aunt does not reply to Mrs. Freeman's letter, she will soon write her another, and Aunt Kathleen will perhaps find out that you took the letter."

"I don't think she will; she is the kind of erratic person who won't in the least remember where she put her letter, and not having a clew, why should she suspect me of taking it?"

"But Mrs. Freeman will write again."

"When she does there will be time enough to consider the right steps to take. She won't write for a week or a fortnight, and a great deal can happen in that time. If the worst comes to the worst, it will be quite possible for me to obtain possession of her next letter."

"O Janet, I can't listen to you; your suggestions are too dreadful."

"All right, my dear." Janet slipped the letter into her pocket. "I know Lady Kathleen's room," she continued, "and I shall manage to put this letter back on her dressing table when I go in. Who's that coming to meet us? Oh, I declare, it is Squire O'Hara! How well your father rides, Bridget! what a handsome man he is?"

Bridget felt as if she should choke; the squire's loud, hearty voice was heard in the distance.

"Hullo, colleens; there you are!" he shouted. "I thought I'd bring the General round in this direction; I had a curiosity to see how you were managing Miss Nelly, my dear." He bowed as he spoke to Janet. "I see you keep your seat very nicely. And you, Biddy—eh, my jewel—why, you look tired. Has Wild Hawk been too much for you?"

"Not a bit, father; I am as right as possible."

Bridget turned swiftly to Janet as she uttered these words.

"I will give you your answer to-morrow," she said in a low tone; "give me until to-morrow to decide."

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER A SPELL.

LADY KATHLEEN did not make much fuss over the loss of her letter.

"It's a queer thing," she said that evening to the squire, as they all sat round the supper table, "but I can't lay my hand on the letter with the Eastcliff post-mark. I made sure that I slipped it into the pocket of the striped lilac silk dress I wore this morning; but I didn't, and I can't imagine where I dropped it."

"Well, my dear, we had better send someone to look for it," said the squire. "That is the letter with all the praise of Biddy in it, isn't it?"

"Squire, you're nothing but a doting old father," replied Lady Kathleen; "you think no one looks at that girl of yours without making a fuss over her. She's a good bit of a thing—I am the last person to deny that; but from the little I saw of Mulberry Court she was no more than any other girl there—indeed, I think our little Janet had wormed herself more into the good graces of the school than my jewel of a Biddy. It's my opinion that the letter contained no more and no less than just the account of the term's expenses, and a request for a check in payment."

"Oh, then, if that's all, it can keep," said Squire

O'Hara. "Mr. O'Hagan, I'll trouble you to pass me the whisky bottle, sir. What's that you are saying, Kathleen?"

"I may lay my hand on it in some out-of-the-way corner," said Lady Kathleen; "if not, I'll write in a day or two to Mrs. Freeman, and tell her that it just got lost. Letters are no end of bother, in my opinion; busy people have really no time to read them. Now, my colleen, what ails you? Why, you're quite white in the cheeks, and you're not eating your usual hearty supper! Don't you fancy that sweetbread, Bridget?"

"Yes, Aunt Kathleen, I am enjoying it very much," said Bridget. "I am quite well, too," she added under her breath.

The next morning Janet came into Bridget's room.

"I won't stay a minute," she said; "but I just thought I'd save you the trouble of a decision, so I tore up the letter last night, and burnt the bits in my candle before I went to sleep. You can't get it back now, even if you wish to be honorable—which I know you don't—so there is a weight off your mind. I told you how Lady Kathleen would take it. What a blessing it is that she is that scatter-brained sort of woman!"

"You oughtn't to speak against her," began Bridget in a feeble tone.

"Oh, oughtn't I, my love? Well, I won't another time. Now we are all going for a pleasure party on the lake; won't you join us?"

"I don't think so," said Biddy; "you two girls and Patrick and Gerald can do very well without me. I want to see my father about Pat Donovan's wedding, and——"

"By the way," said Janet, "is it true that we are all going out to high tea at some outlandish place ten miles away?"

"It is true that we are going to Court Macsherry," said Bridget; "but I don't think you will call it an outlandish place when you see it."

"I can't say," retorted Janet; "and, what is more, I do not care. Your wild Ireland does not come up to my idea at all. I don't care twopence about natural beauties. But I have a little bit of news for you, my pet. Who do you think we'll see at Court Macsherry?"

"The Mahonys and their guests," replied Bridget. "I don't know of anyone else."

"Well—you'll be rather startled—Evelyn Percival is there! I had a letter this morning from Susy Price, and she told me so. Now, of course, I don't care in the very least about Evelyn. I dislike her quite as much as you dislike her; but I want to look very smart and fresh when I go to Court Macsherry, and I want my poor little Sophy also to look as trim and bright as a daisy; so, as you are going to stay at home this morning, Biddy, you might look out for some little ornaments to lend us both."

"Ornaments to lend you!" retorted Bridget, opening her eyes. "What do you mean? Even if I wished to lend you my clothes they would not fit either of you."

"Your dresses wouldn't fit us, of course; but there are lots of other things—sashes, for instance, and necklets, and hats, and we wouldn't mind a pretty parasol each, and we should feel most grateful for some of your embroidered handkerchiefs. I have got that

sweet, pretty dress Lady Kathleen gave me for the bazaar, but poor little Sophy has really nothing fit to appear in; and you must admit that she's a pretty little creature, and would look sweet if she were well dressed. I dare say you have got some white embroidered dresses you used to wear before you grew so tall and gawky, and if there were a tuck put into one of them, little Sophy would look very well in it. I should like her to have a pale blue sash to wear with it, and some large blue Venetian beads to put around her neck. Oh, a young girl needn't have much dress, if it's good. You'll see about it, Bridget, won't you, and have it ready in our room when we come back from our boating expedition?"

Janet ran out of the room as she spoke, slamming the door rather noisily behind her.

Bridget, whose face was white with passion, felt quite too stunned even to move for a minute or two. Then she clenched her hands, walked to the window, and looked out.

"What have I done?" she murmured. "How can I allow myself to get into that horrid girl's power? Oh, surely it would be much, much better to tell my father everything."

She leaned out of the open window, and looked down on the terrace. Her father was lounging on one of the rustic benches. He was smoking a pipe, and Bruin was lying at his feet. Looking at him from her window, Bridget fancied that his old figure looked tired, more bent than usual, more aged than she had ever before noticed it.

"I can't, I won't give him pain!" murmured the girl fiercely. "I'd rather be under the power of

twenty people like Janet than break his heart. But, O Biddy, Biddy O'Hara, what a wicked, senseless girl you have been!"

"Is that you, acushla?" called the squire up to her. "Come right downstairs this minute, and let me hear all your fine plans for Norah's and Pat's wedding. What a colleen you are for planning and contriving! But come away down at once, and let me hear what's at the back of your head."

"Yes, father, in a minute!"

Bridget rushed over to her glass. She looked anxiously at her fair, bright face; it reflected back little or nothing of the loathing with which she regarded herself.

"Oh, what a living lie you are!" she said, clenching her fist at it. "Oh, if father but knew what a base daughter he has got! But he mustn't know. He must never, never know!"

She ran down and joined her father on the terrace. He put his arm round her, made room for her to seat herself by his side, and the two began eagerly to talk and to make arrangements for the coming wedding.

"But you're out of spirits, my darling," said Dennis O'Hara suddenly. "Oh, you needn't try to hide it from me, Biddy. Your heart and soul aren't in your words; I can tell that in the wink of an eye. What's up with you, mavourneen?"

"I'll tell you one thing, daddy; I hate—I loathe school!"

"Well, now," said the squire, "I have no fancy for schools myself; it was your aunt's wish. But your aunt, Biddy"—here a twinkle came into his eye—

"your aunt rules us, not with a rod of iron—oh, by no means—but just with the little, soft, coaxing, and yet determined ways which no one can withstand. She worked on my feelings for nearly two years, Biddy O'Hara. She said you were a fine girl, and a good one, but that you knew nothing, and that if you were ever to be of any use in the world you must go to school."

"Well, father," said Bridget, "did you really think in your own heart when you and I were alone at Castle Mahun that I knew nothing? What about the music we made in the old hall in the winter evenings? and what about that time when I saved Minerva's life, and what about my dancing? I think, somehow or other, I have a little bit of education, father, and I doubt very much if I have really learned anything at school."

"But you will, my pet, you will. These are early days, and you will learn at school. You will learn that sort of things that will make you a fine lady by and by."

"Father," said Bridget, "I don't want to be a fine lady."

She put her arms suddenly round his neck, and looked into his eyes. "Fine ladies are not good, father—they are not good. A girl can be wild and ignorant, and yet good, very good; but a fine lady—oh, I hate the thought of her!"

"How excited you are, Biddy mavourneen, and how strangely you are talking! Whoever thought of your not being the best sort of fine lady, and what fine lady, except your poor Aunt Kathie, have you ever seen, child?"

"I have never seen any; but I feel down in my heart what they are like; and I will never resemble them, even if I spend fifty years in school. Now let us talk of Minerva and her pups. What are you going to do with the pups?"

The conversation turned into channels of a purely domestic nature, and Biddy, as she talked, forgot the cares which harassed and filled her soul.

The young people soon returned from their expedition on Lake Crena. Patrick and Gerald both seemed very much excited, Janet looked resolved and defiant, Sophy alarmed.

"What's the matter with you, Patrick?" said the squire. "I see mischief in that eye of yours. What are you after?"

"Oh, nothing, uncle, nothing," replied the lad. "It is only that Miss Janet May has been rubbing me up. She doesn't believe any of the stories I tell her about Lake Crena."

"Of course I don't," said Janet. "Who would believe a schoolboy's wild chattering nonsense?"

Patrick's black eyes flashed.

"Come, come," said the squire soothingly, and looking with half appeal at Janet; "this fine lad is close on seventeen. He is scarcely to be termed a schoolboy."

"Oh, well, it does not matter what he is called," continued Janet. "If I thought he were only joking, I shouldn't mind; but when he tells me in sober earnest that a witch does live in the island in the center of the lake; that she comes out on winter nights and curses the people who sail on the lake; and, in short, that she's a sort of malevolent old dame

who belongs to the Dark Ages, I simply refuse to believe him."

The squire looked rather startled while Janet was speaking.

"You shouldn't talk of these things," he said to Patrick. "It's all stuff and nonsense. Lake Crena is Lake Crena, the sweetest, sunniest spot in the world all through the summer months; in the winter she is the Witch's Cauldron, and we leave her alone, that's all. Now, young folks, come in to lunch."

Janet did not say anything further, but when in the course of the afternoon the whole party were driving in a great big wagonette to Court Macsherry, Patrick and she found themselves side by side.

"Look here," he said to her then, "are you willing to stick to your word?"

"To what word?" she asked.

"Why, you said that you didn't believe in the Witch?"

"No more I do. How could I be so silly?"

"Hush! Don't talk so loud; Uncle Dennis will hear us. Well, now, I'll put faith in your bravery if you'll stick to what you said. You said you wouldn't mind spending from nine till twelve any night alone on the Witch's Island. Will you do it?"

"As far as the Witch is concerned, I certainly will."

"What do you mean by 'as far as the Witch is concerned'? There is certainly no one else likely to trouble you. There is a little broken-down arbor on the island where you can sit, and Gerald and I will row you over, and come for you again after midnight."

"But," said Janet, "if I promise to do this, you and Gerald won't play me any trick, will you? I know what schoolboys are capable of. I used to stay at a house once where there were lots of boys. I was a little tot at the time, but they did lead me a life."

"I should rather think they did," said Patrick, winking one of his black eyes solemnly at his brother, who was regarding the two from the opposite side of the wagonette with suppressed merriment.

"Well," said Janet, "I know quite well what boys are like; and I'm not going to give myself up to their tender mercies. Of course I don't believe in that silly, stupid story about the Witch, but I do think that you and that fine Gerald of yours over there would be quite capable of playing me a trick, and dressing up as the Witch, or something of that sort. If you both promise on your honor—and Irishmen seem to think a great lot of their honor—if you'll both promise that you'll do nothing mean of that sort, why I'll go to the Witch's Island any night you like, and stay there from nine till twelve o'clock."

"That's all right," said Patrick. "Gerry and I will give you our solemn promise that we'll take you there and go away again, and come back at midnight to fetch you, and that we won't do anything to frighten you ourselves, nor, as far as we can tell, allow anyone else to play a trick on you. There, now, are you satisfied?"

"I suppose I am."

"What night will you go?"

"To-morrow night, if you wish."

"That will do finely. The moon will be at her full

from nine till twelve to-morrow night, and if the Witch comes out of her lair you will have a grand opportunity to get a good view of her. Well, then, that's all right; only you mustn't tell anybody what you're going to do, for, hark ye, Miss May, my Uncle Dennis over there believes in that Witch as he believes in his own life. You wouldn't catch *him* spending three hours alone on that island; no, not for anybody under the sun."

Bridget had felt very angry when Janet had coolly proposed that she and her sister should be decked out in her finery; but, angry as she was, the spell which was over her was sufficiently potent to make her comply with the audacious request which had been made to her. Accordingly, Janet and Sophy looked wonderfully smart when they took off their light dust cloaks in the enormous square oak hall at Court Macsherry. There is really very little difference between one soft coral pink sash and another, between one row of sky-blue Venetian beads and another row; and although Aunt Kathie, with one flashing glance of her bright eyes, discovered that the sashes with which the May girls were ornamented, and the beads which encircled their pretty throats, belonged to Bridget, no one else guessed this for a moment. The Mays looked extra smart and extra pretty, but Biddy had taken less pains than usual with her own dress. It was rich and expensive in texture, as almost all her clothes were, but it was put on untidily, and was too heavy and hot-looking for this lovely summer evening. Her cheeks were flushed, too, and her eyes too bright. She looked like a girl who might be ill presently, and when Evelyn Percival, running down to meet her friends, asked

Biddy if she had a headache, she had to own to the fact that this was the case.

Evelyn was not a pretty girl, but her sweet, kind face looked full of pleasantness to Bridget to-night. Her eyes had such an open, truthful way of looking at one, her lips were so kindly in their curves, her voice so pleasant in its tone, that Squire O'Hara, as he said afterward, fell in love with her on the spot. There were several handsome young Irish girls living at Court Macsherry, and Evelyn looked only like a very pale little flower among them; nevertheless, the squire singled her out for special and marked approval.

"So you are one of my colleen's schoolfellows!" he said. "Well, well, everyone to their taste, but I should have thought Lady Kathleen would have asked *you* to come and stay with us at Castle Mahun."

"I shall be very glad to come over with my cousins to see you some day," replied Evelyn. "I am not Irish, but I love Ireland, and I think Court Macsherry the sweetest place in the world."

"Oh, it isn't bad," said Dennis O'Hara. "I am not going to deny that it is a fine bit of land, and notwithstanding those big bogs to the left there, well cultivated. It might be improved by a bit of water, for instance, but it isn't for me to disparage my neighbor's property."

"My Cousin Norry has been telling me about your Lake Crena," said Evelyn. "I should like to see it!"

"So you shall, my dear; you'll admire it fine. It is as good as the sea to us; there isn't its like in all the country round. When the sun shines on its bosom it is a sight to be remembered, and as to the moonlight effects, why they're just ravishing. Come and take a

walk with me on this terrace, my dear; I want to ask you about my girl Biddy. She don't seem to take to that English school of yours, and I must own that I'm scarcely surprised. That colleen of mine is a wild sort of bird-like thing, and if you have a good many primity ways at school, I don't wonder she can't abide them. Do you see much of her, Miss Percival? You look about the same age, and I suppose you are in the same class."

"I am older than Bridget," said Evelyn Percival. "Bridget is a great deal taller and bigger than any other girl of fifteen in the school."

"Well, do you see much of her?"

"Not as much as I should like. The fact is——"

"What is it, my dear? you might confide in the colleen's father; if there is anything I ought to know——"

"I can't exactly say there is, except—oh, perhaps I ought not to say it."

"But, indeed, you ought. I can see by your eyes that you are a truthful, good sort of girl, and though I have only known you ten minutes, I'd like my wild colleen to be friends with you. What is it now? What's in your mind?"

"I don't at all like to tell you; but the fact is, I was most anxious to be fond of Biddy."

"Yes, my dear, yes; I'm scarcely surprised at that."

"I felt attracted to her the moment I saw her; she was so different from the other girls. Of course, she didn't know the meaning of rules, but there was something about her wonderfully fresh and pleasant, and I and my friend Dorothy Collingwood would have done anything in our power to make school life easy to her."

"You don't mean to tell me that it wasn't easy? Why, she's about as clever a bit of a thing as you could find."

"I don't think anyone denies that; she has not been taught in the ordinary way, so, of course, she could not get into a high class; but that is not the point. I'd have been friends with her, the best of friends, if she hadn't repulsed me."

"Biddy repulse you! She never repulsed mortal in her whole life, the poor darling!"

"I don't think it was her fault; indeed, I am sure it was not, but—and this is the thing that I don't at all like to say—she was, I am convinced, influenced against me by another."

"By another? Who? If you have a nasty sort of girl at the school, she ought to be got rid of. Whom do you mean?"

"I can't bear to tell you, and I may be wrong, but we do think, Dorothy and I, that Biddy would be much, much happier at Mulberry Court but for Janet May."

"Phew!" the Squire drew a long breath; "that pretty little visitor of mine? Lady Kathleen invited her and seemed much taken with her. She told me that Janet was Biddy's dearest friend; but, now that you mention it, I do not see the colleen much with her. You don't mean to tell me?—oh, but I mustn't hear a word against one of my visitors."

"I don't want to say anything, only that Dolly and I are sorry about Bridget, and we are—I must say it frankly—not at all fond of Janet."

"Maybe you're prejudiced; she's a pretty creature, and seems to mean well."

The great bell in the yard at Court Macsherry sounded a tremendous peal for supper.

"That's right," said the squire heartily; "that's a grateful sort of sound when a man is starving, as I happen to be. Let me give you my arm, Miss Percival. I'll never breathe what you have said, of course; but I should be glad if you could do a kindness to my girl next term."

"I will do my very utmost to help her," said Evelyn heartily.

The guests had now assembled in the great dining hall, where a groaning board awaited them.

The squire looked down the long table. Biddy was nowhere to be seen.

"Where can the girl be?" he said under his breath. Somebody else remarked her absence, and Patrick immediately started up to go and look for her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NORAH TO THE RESCUE.

BRIDGET had wandered away by herself. She knew her cousins, the Mahonys of Court Macsherry, too well to stand on the least ceremony with them. The load which crushed against her heart seemed to grow heavier each moment. Her only desire was to be alone.

She knew a spot where no one was likely to disturb her, and, catching up the long train of her rich dress, she ran swiftly until she found a solitary tree which stood a little apart from its fellows, and hung over the borders of the great, big bog which formed a large portion of the Court Macsherry estate.

Bridget climbed up into the hollow of the oak tree, and leaning back against its big trunk, looked out over the dismal, ugly bog. Her brows were drawn down, her beautiful lips drooped petulantly, she pushed back her rich hair from her brow. Her quaint many-colored dress, the background formed by the oak tree, the effect of the wild country which lay before her, gave to her own features a queer weirdness; and a passing traveler, had any been near, might have supposed her to be one of the fabled hamadryads of the oak.

No travelers, however, were likely to see Bridget where she had now ensconced herself. She sat quite still for nearly an hour, then dropping her head on her hands she gave way to a low, bitter moan.

She had scarcely done so before there was a rustling sound heard in the grass. It was pushed aside in the place where it grew longest and thickest, and a woman raised her head and looked up at her.

"Eh, mavourneen?" she said, in a voice of deep love and pity.

The woman was Norah Maloney. She had seen Biddy as she ran across the grass to her seat in the oak tree, and had crept softly after her, happy and content to lie silent and unobserved in the vicinity of her adored young mistress.

Norah was a *protégée* of the Mahonys as well as the O'Haras, and thought nothing of walking from one estate to the other. She crouched motionless in the long grass, scarcely daring to breathe or discover her vicinity in any way, until Biddy's heartbroken moan reached her ears.

Uncontrollable pity then overcame all other feelings. Her child, her darling was unhappy. Come what might, Norah must comfort her.

"Eh, mavourneen?" she said then. "Core of me heart, you're in throuble! What can Norah do for yez?"

"I am unhappy, Norah!" said Bridget. She sprang out of the oak tree as she spoke. "O Norah, Norah!" she exclaimed, clasping the old servant's horny hand; "don't tell anyone—don't, don't for the life of you, Norah; but I hate Janet May."

"That young Englisher colleen?" said Norah, her eyes flashing angry fire. "Eh, but she's a cowld-hearted foreigner. Eh, but it isn't me nor Pat nayther that's took with her ways."

"It's dreadful of me to say anything," continued

Bridget. "She's my visitor, and I have told you that I hated her. Forget it, Norah—forget it."

"Secret as the grave I'll keep it," replied Norah, with emphasis.

Bridget ran back to the house, and the old servant, with a certain stealthy movement, which was more or less habitual to her, glided away through the long grass. She walked two or three hundred yards in this fashion, then she came to a stile which led directly to the dusty and forsaken highroad. Here Norah stooped down and carefully removed her thick hobnailed shoes and coarse, gray woolen stockings. She thrust the stockings into her capacious pocket, and tying the shoes together with a coarse piece of string, slung them over her arm. After this, she kilted her petticoats an inch or two higher, and the next moment began to run swiftly and silently over the dusty road. Her movements were full of ease, and even grace. Her bare feet quickly covered the ground.

She ran with a certain swing, which did not abate in speed as she flew over the road. Mile after mile she went in this fashion, never once losing her breath, or appearing in the least inconvenienced by her rapid motion. At last she turned up a narrow mountain path. Here the ground was very rough, and she was obliged to go slowly, but even here her bare feet carried her with unerring surety. She neither slipped nor stumbled, and never once faltered in her swift upward course.

After going up the mountain for nearly half a mile, she came suddenly upon the little shanty or mud hut where Pat, the boy whom Norah loved, lay flat on his back on a rude bed of straw.

Norah lifted the latch of the door, and came in.

"Here's poor Norah back, Pat," she said. "And how are you, alanna? Is it dhry ye feels and lonesome? Well, then, here's Norah to give wather for your thirst, and news to fill your heart."

"Why, then, Norah, you look spent and tired," said Pat. "And what's up now, girl, and why did you come up the cliff as if you had the hounds at your heels?"

"Bekaze I had some news," said Norah, "and my heart burned to tell it to yez. I have gone over a good bit of ground to-day, Pat, and I put two and two together. I said the young Englisher wasn't afther no good, and well I knows it now. It's our Miss Bridget has a sore heart; and why should she have it for the loikes of her?"

Pat Donovan was a man of very few words, but he raised his big head now from its pillow, and fixed his glittering black eyes on the old and anxious face of Norah with keen interest.

"Spake out what's in yer mind, girl," he said. "Thim what interferes with our Miss Biddy 'ull have cause to wish themselves out of Ould Oireland before many days is over."

"Thrue for yez, Pat," said Norah; "and glad I am that I has come to a right-hearted boy like yourself, for I knew as you'd see the rights of it, and maybe rid Miss Bridget of an enemy."

"Spake," said Pat, "and don't sit there running round and round the subject; spake, Norah, and tell me what you're after!"

"Well, then, it's this," said Norah. "Be a token which I can't reveal, for I promised faithfully I wouldn't,

our Miss Biddy is fit to break her heart bekaze of that young Englisher. Now, I know that to-morrow night Miss Janet May is going to the Witch's Island, jest for the sake of brag, and to prove that she don't hould by no witches nor fairies, nor nothing of that sort; and the young gentlemen 'll take her over to the island at nine o'clock, and they'll go to fetch her again at twelve, and what I say, Pat, is this——"

"Whist!" said Pat, raising his big hand, and a look of mystery coming over his face; "whist, Norah, mavourneen, you come over here and sit nigh me, and let's talk the matter over."

CHAPTER XXV.

HER MAJESTY THE WITCH.

JANET enjoyed the feeling that Bridget was now in her power. She had something of the cat nature, and she liked to torture this very fine and rare specimen of mouse which she had unexpectedly caught. She was so clever, however, that no one suspected her of anything but the heartiest friendship for Bridget. Even the squire, whose eyes were more or less opened by Evelyn's talk, and who watched Janet now with intense scrutiny, could see nothing to object to in her.

"It is a pity that other nice colleen should have those jealous thoughts," he said to himself; "that little Miss May is as nice and good-hearted a bit of a thing as I have come across for many a day. I can see by the very way she walks, and eats, and looks, that she's just devoted to Biddy; and, for the matter of that, who can wonder, for everybody likes my colleen."

The weather was very beautiful just now, and the young people spent almost all their time in the open air. Bridget, who had avoided the society of the other young folks yesterday, seemed quite to have recovered her good spirits to-day, and merry laughter made the beautiful old place seem more gay and cheerful than ever. Patrick, however, and Gerald, for some reason or other, as the day advanced, did not

look quite at ease. Supper was at eight at Castle Mahun, and it was arranged that immediately after that meal the boys should row Janet over to the island and leave her there. The secret was to be revealed to no one, but for some reason it did not give them the complete satisfaction it had done yesterday.

They were kind-hearted lads, and although they had plenty of mischief in their composition, would not willingly hurt anyone. They were as superstitious as Irish lads could be, and as the fateful hour approached Patrick called his younger brother aside.

"Have you anchored the boat quite snug under the big willow," he asked, "where Uncle Dennis won't get a glimpse of it? He'd be sure to be mad if he thought we were going on Lake Crena to-night."

"And why to-night," asked Gerald, "more than any other night? The lake is as safe a place as your bed, except from September to March. Why shouldn't we have a row on Lake Crena to-night, Pat?"

"For the best of good reasons," said Pat. "The full moon is just beginning to wane to-night; that is the only night in the month when the Witch gets restless. I am sorry, for my part, that I asked Miss May to go to the island. I made sure, of course, that she'd funk it when it came to the point; I never guessed that she'd go on with it. Whatever she is, she's plucky; I'll say that for her."

"I don't see that she's so plucky," retorted Gerry; "she doesn't believe in the Witch, you know—she laughs when we speak about her."

"But suppose—suppose she—she sees her," said Patrick, his big black eyes growing full of gloom, and

even fear. "Gerry, I'd never forgive myself if I did such a dastardly thing as to give a poor girl like that a real fright."

Gerald looked reflective.

"I don't think the Witch walks about until past eleven," he said, "and why shouldn't we go back for Janet at eleven? She'll have spent two hours on the island then, and will be quite satisfied with herself."

"Yes, that's all very fine, and then she'll boast to the end of her days that we haven't got a witch."

"Well, even that is better than to give her such a rousing fright that she'll be deprived of her senses. There's the supper gong, Pat; we must go into the house. Uncle Dennis will suspect something if we are not tucking-in as hard as possible in a minute or two from now."

"I can't help it, I am too anxious to eat," said Pat. "I wish I hadn't thought of the thing. Of course, I see we must go through with it now; she'd brag all her days that we had only pretended about the Witch if we didn't. But I vow I'll—I'll stay somewhere near and—and watch—I vow I will. Come along into the house, Gerry, and keep your own counsel, if you can; you have such a way of getting your face full of your thoughts that people can almost read them."

"If there is roley-poley pudding for supper," said Gerry, "I'll get my thoughts packed full of that, and my face too. The roley-poley pudding expression is innocent enough, isn't it?"

Pat gave his brother a playful cuff on the ear, and they went into the house together.

Janet was seated near Lady Kathleen. Her face was absolutely tranquil. So unconcerned and serene

was its expression that Gerry, as he passed her chair, could not forbear bending forward and whispering in her ear:

"I guess you're funking it."

Janet's blue-gray eyes looked calmly up at him.

"I have nothing to funk," she replied, in the same low tone.

The squire shouted to Gerald to take his seat, and the meal proceeded.

Very soon after supper Gerald and Patrick disappeared. They ran down a shady walk, and soon reached the old willow tree under which the boat was moored.

"She'll funk it for sure and certain," said Gerry again.

"No, that's not her," replied Patrick; "and, hark! do you hear her footstep? Here she comes! For my part, I wish we were well out of this."

"There's no help for it now," retorted Gerald; "she'd laugh at us all our born days if we didn't go on with it. Well, Miss May, and so your ladyship is pleased to accept our escort to the Witch's Island."

Gerry made a low bow as he spoke, and pulling off his somewhat tattered straw hat, touched the ground with it ere he replaced it on the back of his curly head.

Janet was seen leisurely approaching. She carried a little white shawl over her arm, and a yellow-backed novel in her other hand.

"I say," exclaimed Patrick, coming up to her, "you don't mean to tell me you are going to read?"

"And why not?" replied Janet; "it would be rather dull work sitting for three hours in that

island doing nothing. See what I have also brought —a box of matches and a piece of candle. You say ther a little old summerhouse there—in that summerhouse I'll sit and read 'Pretty Miss Neville.' I assure you, boys, the time will pass very quickly and agreeably."

"You have some spunk in you," said Patrick, in a tone of genuine admiration. His black eyes flashed fire with the admiration he felt for the slim pale girl who was brave enough to despise the superstitious terrors which overmastered himself.

There was no horse in the country round about that Patrick O'Mahony would not have mounted; the most terrible danger could not have daunted his spirit. His physical courage had never known the point where fear could conquer it; but he owned to himself that he would have shrunk in abject terror from the very simple feat of sitting for three hours alone in the Witch's Island.

"If you'd like to get out of it," he said suddenly, "Gerry and I will never tell—will we, Gerry?"

"No, truth and honor!" replied Gerald.

"You see you have proved your pluck," continued Patrick. "It would be awfully dull for you staying for three hours alone on the island."

"Not at all, I assure you," replied Janet; "I have my book and my candle. Help me into the boat, please, gentlemen, or I shall begin to think you are a fine pair of little humbugs."

"Oh, if that is your way of putting it," said Patrick, his quick temper easily roused, "we had better start at once. Come along, Gerry; help me to unmoor the boat. Now, Miss Janet, jump in, if you please."

Five minutes later, Janet May found herself alone on the tiny patch of ground which went by the name of the Witch's Island.

It consisted of a thickly wooded piece of land rising up in the very center of Lake Crena, and about three-quarters of an acre in size. There was a little landing-place where some of the thick trees had been cleared away. Here, high and dry, and well out of reach of the water, stood a rude summerhouse. Janet waited alone on the little strip of quay until the boat, turning a tiny headland, was lost to view; then she went into the summerhouse, and lighting her candle sat down on a broken-down bench, placed the candle securely on a small stone slab by her side, and opening her novel began to read. The courage she had shown was not in the least assumed. This enterprise simply amused her; she expected to find the time dull—dullness was the worst enemy that could possibly visit her.

"Pretty Miss Neville," however, was quite to her taste, and turning its leaves quickly, she soon lost herself in a world far away from the Witch's Island, and much more in harmony with her own ambitious and eager spirit. She, too, would win her triumphs, and have her lovers in the not too distant future. Oh, how splendidly she had managed everything! How nice it was to have a girl like Bridget O'Hara completely in her power! Janet's thoughts after all proved more delightful than her book. She closed it, and coming out of the little stuffy summerhouse stood on the tiny quay and looked around her. The moon was getting up slowly, and was shedding silver paths of shimmery light over beautiful Lake Crena. The scene was so

lovely, so exquisitely soothing and peaceful, that a girl with a different order of mind might have felt her thoughts rise as she looked at that moonlight path, and some aspirations for the good, the true, the noble, might have filled her breast. Janet was not without imagination as she looked at that long silver path which stretched away from her very feet onward to the distant horizon, but it only brought to her visions of Paris and Lady Kathleen, and what she would do to aggrandize herself in the delightful future which was so near.

Her meditations were suddenly disturbed by a slight noise to her right.

She looked around her carelessly. "Can the Witch be coming?" she said, with a slight laugh.

At that moment the great clock in the stable at Castle Mahun struck ten; the deep notes swelled and died away on the evening breeze.

"That noise can't be caused by the Witch," thought Janet, "for the boys say that she seldom deigns to put in an appearance before eleven o'clock; oh, dear! oh, dear! have I two more hours to spend on this detestable spot? When will they have passed away? What shall I do to kill time? I had better go back and go on with my book." She was about to re-enter the little summerhouse when the distinct splash of an oar on the water reached her ears.

She could not help giving a start, and then exclaimed with a sigh of relief:

"Is that you, Pat? But you need not come back yet. I assure you I am thoroughly comfortable. I am waiting in state for her majesty Mrs. Witch to visit me."

There was no reply whatever to Janet's gay sally. She entered the summerhouse and, rearranging her candle, opened her book, and went on reading.

Again there was a sound on the island; this time it was the cracking of a bough.

"A bird or a rabbit, or some small inoffensive creature of that sort," murmured the girl; but, for the first time, her heart beat a little more quickly.

"It is absurd," she said to herself. "One would absolutely suppose, to look at me now, that I gave credence to the boys' ridiculous tales. Well, this is a very dull escapade at best, and catch me going in for anything of the kind again. I must make the best of it now, however."

She turned another page of her book, found that the plot was thickening and the situation becoming more exciting, and forgot herself in Miss Neville's sorrows.

She was soon startled back to consciousness of present things, however. She not only heard another bough crack, and a low, thick shrub rustle, but she also distinguished a sure and unmistakable "Whist! whist!" in a man's deep tones. It was plain, therefore, that she was not alone on the island. Even now she was not afraid of the witch; but she had a very substantial fear of human foes, and she already guessed that more than one of Bridget's lawless friends would be quite capable of doing her an ill turn.

With a sudden feeling of satisfaction she remembered that she had a dog-whistle fastened to her watch-chain. If she blew a shrill blast with the whistle it would frighten any concealed enemies away, and bring the boys quickly to her rescue.

She stepped out of the hut, therefore, and put the whistle to her lips.

"No, none of that!" said a voice. "You'll come with me, miss, and the fewer questions you axes the better."

A rough man of powerful build, with a piece of crape tied across his eyes, rushed suddenly forward in the moonlight. He drew a thick cloth over the girl's head and shoulders, a pair of strong arms encircled her waist; she found herself lifted from the ground, and knew that she was being carried rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

THERE was great fun and excitement at Castle Mahun that night, and Janet's absence was not in the least noticed.

It was a moonlight night, and the squire's will and pleasure was that every member of the household who cared to come should assemble on the wide terrace outside the Castle to hear Biddy play some of the Irish melodies on her harp.

Biddy's performances were well worth listening to. From far and near the heterogeneous crowd who were wont to throng to the Castle assembled to hear her.

"The Harp that once through Tara's Halls" floated on the night breeze. The wild, sweet melody sounded quite eerie, and caused two excited boys to shiver as they listened. They were thinking of Janet on the Witch's Island, and longing for the moment when they might fly down to the boat, row across to the island, and release her from captivity.

"A jig! Let us have a jig!" shouted the squire. "Come, Biddy, colleen, you and Pat give us all an Irish jig."

Bridget was nothing loath to obey. Someone scraped the bow of an old fiddle, and merry, quick music succeeded the more somber notes. Bridget's

and Pat's dance was followed by many others, and the fun rose fast and furious.

By and by eleven struck from the clock in the court-yard. The boys crept down unobserved to the shores of the lake, and the rest of the party went to bed.

Bridget had forgotten all her sorrows in a sound sleep. In her healthy young slumbers she had not even room for dreams. A smile lingered round her pretty lips, her dark curly lashes lay heavily on her rose-tinted cheeks.

"Bang! bang!" There came some pummels at her door, then the handle was turned, and muffled feet stepped as noiselessly as they could across the old and creaking boards.

"You wake her, Gerry," said Pat.

"I can't—I don't like to!" said Gerry, with a sob in his throat.

"Well, then, I will. What a little coward you are! Why can't you control yourself? What is the good of being in such a beastly funk? It will be all right when Biddy knows. I say, Biddy! Biddy, wake! How soundly she sleeps! Let's strike a match, and flash it into her eyes, Gerry."

"No, no; Uncle Dennis will hear us," said Gerry, his teeth chattering more than ever.

"Let's pull her, then," said Pat. "Let's give a tug at her hair. Oh, I say, Biddy, you might wake and help a fellow."

These last almost wailing words penetrated the sleeper's dreams. She opened her eyes with a start, and said aloud:

"I won't get into your power, Janet," and then exclaimed in astonishment, when she saw her two

cousins standing by her bedside, the moonlight streaming all over them:

"What is the matter?" she said. "You up, Pat, and you, Gerry! What does this mean?"

The moment her words reached his ears Gerry flung himself on his knees, buried his head in the bedclothes, and began to sob violently.

"Oh, do shut up, you little beggar!" said Pat. "What is the good of waking the house? Biddy, we are in an awful mess, Gerry and I, and we can't talk to you here. Won't you get up and come down to the hall, and let us tell you what is the matter? Bruin is the only living creature there, and he'll not let out a sound if we tell him that you are coming."

"Yes, I'll be with you in a minute," said Bridget.

She rose quickly, dressed almost in a twinkling, and a few minutes later was standing with her cousins in the great entrance hall of the Castle.

They quickly told the first part of their tale—all about Janet, and the challenge which had passed between them. Biddy was just as fearless as her cousins, but she, too, was superstitious, and she felt a catch in her breath, and a sudden sensation of respect for Janet, when the boys told her how absolutely indifferent to fear she was, and how willing to spend three hours alone on the haunted island.

"We went back for her sharp at eleven. Poor little spunky thing! she hadn't a scrap of fear when we left her. There she stood, smiling and nodding to us, with that stupid old novel in her hand, and just making us believe that she was going to have quite a good time; but when we went back she was nowhere

to be seen. As sure as you are there, Biddy, there wasn't a sight of her anywhere."

"The Witch came, of course, and took her away," said Gerry. He shook all over as he spoke.

"Don't be a goose," said Biddy. "Let me think; it *couldn't* have been the Witch."

"Why, of course it was, Biddy. Who else could it have been? She's gone; she's not on the island; and you know the stories of the Witch—how she does appear on certain nights when the moon is in the full."

"Yes, I know that," said Bridget. "She does appear, and she frightens folks, and perhaps goes the length of turning them crazy; but she doesn't spirit them away. How can she? Oh, do let me think. Don't talk for a minute, boys; I have got to puzzle this thing out."

The boys did not say a word. Gerry stooped crying, and Pat fixed his big eyes gloomily on his cousin. Biddy was a girl, an Irish girl, and such are quick to jump to conclusions. The boys watched her face now with devouring interest. Bruin rose slowly to his feet, pattered solemnly across the polished floor, and laid his big head on her lap.

Biddy's shapely hand touched his forehead, but her thoughts were far away. After a time she said quickly:

"There is but one thing to be done: we must find Norah Malone without a minute's loss of time."

"Norah!" exclaimed both the boys.

"You must have taken leave of your senses, Bridget!" exclaimed Pat. "What has Norah to do with Janet May and the island?"

"I can't tell you," said Bridget. "I have just a

fear in my heart, and Norah may set it at rest. We must find her. We must go to her at once, this very night."

"Where is she?" asked Pat. "I haven't seen her for days past."

"She may be up on the mountain with Donovan. You know they are to be married in a couple of days, and Donovan is to be moved down on a litter to the Castle. Or she may be sleeping at the Hogans' at the lodge. We will go to the Hogans' first, and if they can tell nothing about her we must go up to the mountains. There is nothing whatever else to be done."

"It seems such a waste of time," grumbled Pat. "It is Janet we want to find."

"And I tell you it is through Norah we'll find her," answered Bridget, stamping her foot at him. "Come along, boys, both of you, and Bruin, you come, too. We have a night's work before us, and we haven't a minute to lose."

"It is the night when the moon is at the full," said Gerry, "and—and the Witch may come to us, and—I couldn't *bear* to look at her."

"Well, go to bed, you little coward!" said Pat, flashing round at him, and aiming a cuff at his head.

Gerry darted behind Bridget for protection.

"Come, boys, don't quarrel," she said. "Gerry, you know you are not a real coward. Come along this minute and help us."

She was unbarring the bolts which secured the great front door as she spoke. The next moment the three young folks were standing on the terrace.

"The dogs will raise an alarm," said Bridget;

"that's the worst of them. If so, my father will get up, and everything will be known. Stay, though, I'll send Bruin round to speak to them. Come here, darling, I want you."

The great dog came up to her.

She knelt on the gravel, with the moon shining all over her, and looked into his eyes.

"Go round to the dogs, Bruin," she said, "and tell them to be quiet, and then come back to me. Go quickly."

The deerhound licked his mistress's hand, and then trotted in sober, solemn fashion round by the shrubbery and disappeared.

The girl and the boys waited anxiously. Not a dog bayed, not a sound of any sort was audible. Bruin trod on the velvety turf as he returned. He looked up at Bridget, who bent down and kissed him between the eyes.

"Good King!" she said, and then she and the boys started off as fast as they could to the Hogans' cottage, where Norah might possibly be sleeping.

No sign of her there; no tidings of her, either. Hogan got up and put out a white face of amazement from one of the tiny windows of the cottage when Bridget made her demand. If he knew anything of Norah's wherebouts, neither face nor manner betrayed him.

"It's no good, boys," said Bridget, "she is not there; or if she is, Hogan has got the word not to tell. We might stand and talk to him forever before he'd let even a wink of an eye betray him. There is nothing whatever for it but for us to go to the cottage on the mountains."

"THE GREAT DOG CAME UP TO HER."—*p.* 308.

Gerry was quite silent now. He took care to keep Bridget between himself and Pat, and no one particularly noticed when he started at his own shadow, and when he looked guiltily behind.

Even to ride on horseback to Donovan's cabin, in the midst of the lonely mountains, took a long time; but to walk on foot in the uncertain moonlight was truly a weary undertaking.

It was between three and four in the morning when the children, exhausted and almost spent, stumbled up against the little cabin, to find the door locked and the house deserted.

Gerry burst out crying, and even Bridget owned that she had come to the end of her resources.

"Don't talk to me, either of you," she said; "I am more persuaded than ever that Norah and Donovan are at the bottom of this. There is nothing for it now but to go home."

"How dare we?" said Pat. "Uncle Dennis will almost kill Gerry and me if he knows of this."

"We must go home, boys; we must face the thing. We had better step out now as fast as we can, or the servants will be up."

"I can't tell Uncle Dennis of this," said Pat; "I simply can't."

"Don't say whether you can or cannot now," said Bridget; "let us go back as quickly as possible."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"SPEAK OUT!"

SQUIRE O'HARA was the first of the family to put in an appearance the next morning at the breakfast table. He looked round him somewhat impatiently. He did not count Miss Macnamara, nor old Captain Shand, nor one or two more of the visitors, as anybody. When they came in he simply nodded to them, but his impatient eyes looked eagerly at the vacant places which his own family ought to occupy.

What was the matter with the world?

Where was his sister-in-law Kathleen? She was up too early as a rule—fidgeting, fussing, talking, and clattering. Where were those imps, Pat and Gerry? Where were the two nice little English girls?—and, above all, where was his colleen, his darling, the apple of his eye?

"Shall I pour out your tea for you, squire?" asked Miss Macnamara in a timid voice.

"No, I thank you," he replied; "I'll wait for my family. Help yourself; help yourself, I beg. Captain Shand, pray tackle the beef; Mr. Jones, try that kippered salmon. Nobody need wait breakfast who doesn't wish to; but I'm not hungry. I'll just step out on the terrace for a minute or two until some of my family choose to put in an appearance."

The squire opened the window as he spoke, and,

stepping over the sill, was just about to call to the dogs to accompany him in his walk when a little, shabby, gray-haired woman started up almost at his feet, and raised two blazing black eyes to his face.

"Is that you, Norah?" said the squire. "And may I ask what you are doing here crouching down among the rose-bushes?"

"Nothing, yer honor; sure as I live I'm doing nothing!" said Norah. "I was only waiting to catch a sight of Miss Biddy, bless her."

"You surely did not lie in ambush in this absurd fashion to see Miss Bridget. She does not want people skulking after her like that. There, my good woman, don't look at me as if I were going to eat you. Go round to the kitchen and have some breakfast, and you shall see Miss Biddy afterward."

The squire heard fresh sounds of arrival in the breakfast room at this moment. In consequence, his voice grew more cordial.

He passed in again through the open window, and Norah quickly disappeared round by the shrubbery.

"Is that you, Biddy?" he said. "How are you, my love? Oh! and Kathleen, you have put in an appearance at last; and here the boys, and Miss Sophy. Come, that's right, that's right. Now let us sit down and enjoy ourselves. I have been out since six o'clock, and I'm quite disposed to do justice to my tea and fresh eggs. Here, Biddy, you shall pour me out a cup with your own fair hands, alanna."

The squire drew up to the table, making a considerable amount of bluster and noise. Bruin

crouched in his usual place by Bridget's side; Sophy sat near Lady Kathleen; the boys began hungrily to attack a huge bowl of porridge each, and the meal proceeded.

"You are all very silent," said the squire. "Have none of you anything to say for yourselves? Not a laugh do I hear—not a whisper. Half an hour late for breakfast, and everyone coming in as mum as if we were all a house of the dead! Come, Biddy, come, haven't you a joke to crack with anyone?"

"Oh, squire," said Lady Kathleen, from the other end of the long board, "we just want you to drink off your tea first. Oh, oh, oh! Sophy, poor child, poor child, restrain yourself. There, she can't, the creature, she can't. Put your arms round my neck, pet, and cry here then; poor little dear, poor little dear!"

"What in the name of fortune does this mean?" exclaimed Dennis O'Hara. "Biddy, can you explain it? Why, your face is like a sheet, child. What can be wrong?"

"I will tell you, Dennis," said Lady Kathleen. "Poor little Janet is lost. If you hadn't been so taken up with all the singing and the dancing last night you'd have missed her from our family circle, for she wasn't there then, and she isn't here now; and what's more, she hasn't been in her bed the whole of the blessed night, and there's Sophy fit to break her heart, and no wonder, poor thing, no wonder, for if there was a nice devoted little sister it was Janet. I am fearing that the poor child has fallen from a precipice, or gone too far into one of the bogs. I always told you, squire, that you didn't half drain

those bogs. Now, what is it? Oh, mercy me, what awful thing are you going to say?"

"I'm going to request you to hold your tongue," said the squire. "We none of us can hear ourselves speak with you, Kathleen. And a fine, queer tale you have to tell! Miss Janet May hasn't been in the house all night! Is that true, Miss Sophy?"

"She wasn't in her room last night," said Sophy, a fresh sob breaking her voice.

"But this must be looked into at once," continued the squire. "One of my visitors has been absent from my roof all night, and I am only told of it now—now—and it past eight o'clock in the morning! *This is a scandalous shame!* Why, there isn't a man or boy in the place who shouldn't have been searching round for the bit of a colleen four hours past. But, of course, *I'm* always kept in the dark. Although I am Squire O'Hara of Castle Mahun, I'm just nobody, I suppose? Now, what is it, Bridget—what are you going to say? I won't take interference from anyone when I am roused like this."

The squire was in one of his rare, but terrible passions: his lips trembled, his eyes blazed, his great hand shook.

"I have got something to tell you," began Bridget.

"Oh, you have, have you? You can throw light on this scandal then? Speak out, speak out this minute."

"Will you come with me into your study? I'd rather tell you alone."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. You speak out here. It's a nice state of things when the master of the house is kept in the dark! That girl should have been searched for last night when she didn't come in. And

of course she *would* have been searched for if I had been told of it; but the rest of you must hugger-mugger together and keep me in the dark. I call this state of things disgraceful. Now what is it you have got to say, Bridget? Are you a coward too, afraid to tell your own father? A nice state of things the world is coming to! Speak! are you *afraid* of me?"

"I am a coward, and I *am* afraid of you," said Bridget.

Her words were so absolutely unexpected that every single individual seated round the breakfast table started back with an astonished exclamation.

Bridget's own face was white as death. She stepped a little away from the table; Bruin got up and stood by her side. She was unconscious of the fact that her hand rested on his great head.

"Speak up," thundered the squire, "I'll have no more shuffling. You look as if you were ashamed of something. I see it in your eye. You are my only child—the last of the race, and you are *ashamed!* Good God, that I should live to see this day. But come, no more shuffling—out with the truth!"

"I know something about Janet, and so also do Pat and Gerry," continued Bridget. "I'd rather tell you by yourself, father; I wish you'd let me."

"No, that I won't; if you have done anything wrong you have got to confess it. A pretty pass we have come to when Bridget O'Hara has to confess her sins! But, never mind, though you were twenty times my child, you'll have to stand here and tell the truth *before everyone.* Now speak up, speak up this minute—Kathleen! if you don't stop blubbering you'll have to leave the room."

Dennis O'Hara's face was terrible.

He and Bridget were the only ones standing; all the rest remained glued to their chairs, without speaking or moving.

"Now go on," he said, "we are all waiting to hear this fine confession; did you spirit Janet May away?"

"No, I didn't. You make me cease to fear you, father, when you speak in that tone," said Bridget. "I have behaved badly, I—I thought it would break my heart to tell you; but when you look at me like that——"

"Like what? Go on, Biddy, or you'll drive me mad."

"Well, I know what has happened to Janet. She went over to the Witch's Island last night. She said there was no witch. Nothing would make her believe in a witch, and she would go; it was her own desire."

"And you took her there, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't; I had nothing to do with it."

"It was I who did that part, uncle," said Pat, suddenly springing to his feet. "I won't let Biddy be the only one scolded; I was in an awful funk when I found what had happened, but I can't stand here and hear a girl spoken to like this; and Biddy isn't a bit nor a morsel to blame. It's just Biddy all out to try and shield other people; but it was my fault, mine and Gerry's. What is it, uncle? what is it you are saying to me?"

"Come over here this minute," said the squire. "Shake hands with me; you are a fine lad, you are a very fine lad. Oh, thank Heaven! I thought the colleen had done something wrong. It isn't a bit of matter about anybody else. Speak out, Pat, speak out; and, oh! alanna, alanna, forgive me, forgive me.

I thought bad of you, my jewel, my sweet! Come into my arms, my colleen asthore. What matter who is black, when you are white as a lily?"

Dennis O'Hara's burst of passion was over as quickly as it had arisen; he went up to Bridget and folded his great arms round her slight young figure.

"But I am not white," she said, bursting into sudden uncontrollable weeping; "oh, I am not white, and you'll never love me any more, and my heart will break. I can't tell you now, before everybody. I just can't, I can't. Pat knows all about Janet. Pat can tell *that* story, and you are not going to be too angry with him; but I must go away, for I can't speak of the other thing. There, father, don't kiss me, I cannot stand it."

She wrenched herself out of his arms and flew from the room.

It was a glorious summer's day; the sun was blazing down from the sky with a fierce heat. Bridget felt half blinded with misery and confusion of mind. She put up her hand to her head and glanced up at the sky.

"I must tell my father everything when I see him next," she said to herself. "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

Footsteps sounded behind her, She felt impatient of anyone seeing her in her grief and distraction, and, turning to hide herself in the shrubbery, found that she was face to face with Norah.

"I seen you, me darling," said Norah; "I seen you when you ran out of the breakfast room all distraught like."

"You saw me? then you were listening, Norah,"

said Bridget, her tears drying rapidly in her sudden anger.

"And why not, alanna? and why shouldn't I listen when it was for the good of my own nursling? The squire says, 'Go and have some breakfast, Norah'; but what's breakfast to me when the light of my eyes, the child I helped to rear, is suffering. I listened, Miss Biddy, and when you run out of the room I followed you. You come with me, alanna. You trust poor Norah. Norah Malony and Pat Donovan 'ud spill their heart's blood for you, missie; you trust us both!"

"I thought as much," said Bridget. "Come back here into the shade of the shrubbery, Norah; I guessed last night that you were at the bottom of this. Don't you know that you have behaved disgracefully? Do you think my father will help you to marry Pat after such conduct as this? No, don't go down on your knees; I am not inclined to intercede for you at present. I am not inclined to take your part. You must go this instant to the place where you have hidden Janet May. There is not a moment to lose; go and bring her back at once!"

Norah began to cry feebly.

"You are hard on me," she sobbed, "and I done it for you—Pat and me, we done it for you. We meant no harm either. The young Englisher girl have come to no grief—leastways, nothing but a bit of a fright, and she'll do what we wants if you don't spoil everything, Miss Bridget."

"I don't understand you, Norah; I don't feel even inclined to listen to you. You must go this minute and release poor Janet."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT THE O'HARAS SAID TO ONE ANOTHER.

THE race of human beings who can neither read nor write are fast vanishing from the face of the civilized earth. They used, however, to abound in great numbers in old Ireland, and, strange as it may seem, these so-called uneducated people have proved themselves to be some of the shrewdest in the world.

For, never reading the books of men, they are always perusing the greater book of nature. Unacquainted with the art of writing, they trust absolutely to their memories. The observation, therefore, of the Irish peasant can scarcely be credited by those who have never come across him.

Norah had made up her mind that Janet should not be released from the hiding-place to which she and Pat had spirited her until she made full confession of her own part in making Bridget unhappy. It is true Norah had never heard the tale, but she seemed to know as much about it as if she had been in everybody's confidence, and had even joined the Fancy Fair Committee, and sat in Mrs. Freeman's schoolroom when Bridget, under Janet's directions, cribbed her lessons.

If Bridget herself, however, wished Janet to be set free, there was no help for it.

"You wait here, Miss Biddy," she said; "you needn't go for Miss Janet May. I'll bring her to you in an hour at the farthest."

"Very well, Norah," said Bridget, "I'll wait for you here."

She sat down as she spoke, under the shelter of a large birch tree, and, leaning her head against its silver stem, fell into a heavy sleep.

She dreamt in her sleep, and these dreams were so disquieting that she could not help crying out and moaning heavily. She opened her eyes at last to see her old father standing by her.

For a moment she could not remember where she was, nor what had happened. The smile which always filled her eyes when she looked at her dearly loved father came into them now; a gay word banished the sorrowful lines from round her lips, and, with a little laugh, she rose to her feet.

"How ridiculous of me to have gone to sleep in the wood," she exclaimed.

Then memory came back. She flushed first, and then turned deadly pale.

"You are in trouble, alanna," said Squire O'Hara. "I know that by the look you wore in your sleep; I never saw my colleen wear a face so full of sorrow before. There's something on your mind, acushla, and you are afraid to tell your father. Maybe I frightened you a bit in the parlor just now; if so, my heart's core, you must forgive me. I was taken aback and put out, and we O'Haras are celebrated for our hasty tempers. I am not angry now, however: my anger has passed like a morning cloud. You tell me all that is vexing you, Biddy. Put your arms round

me, and whisper your trouble in my ears, my own colleen."

"And why should a beautiful young lady like that have any throuble," exclaimed another voice.

The squire and Bridget both started and turned round. Janet May and Norah were coming up the little path, and even now stood by their sides.

"Here's the young Englisher lady," said Norah. "She's none the worse for having spent one night with the Irish folk, and there's no throuble, now that she has come back; is there, Miss Biddy?"

For one instant Bridget was silent.

Janet came up to her and spoke in a gentle, cheerful tone. "I am so glad to be back with you, dear," she said. "I dare say you and the squire were uneasy about me. Well, I had an adventure, and am none the worse. I'll tell you all about it presently. Norah has something, also, to say for herself; but she, too, will speak presently. Now I have one request to make of the squire."

"What is that, my dear?" asked Dennis O'Hara.

"It is that no one shall be punished on my account," said Janet, in her sweet, low tones. "There was just a little bit of a practical joke played on me. You Irish are celebrated for practical jokes, are you not? I came to no harm, and if I don't wish anyone to be punished, I suppose my wishes are worth considering, as I was the only one who suffered."

"You are by no means the only one who suffered, Miss May," said the squire. "Look at Biddy, there. Why is her face so pale, and why are her eyes so heavy? And as to practical jokes, I never heard that it was the way of the Irish gentry to practice them

upon their visitors. My dear young lady, I appreciate your kind and generous spirit. It does my old heart good to see you here safe and unharmed, but you must allow me to deal with this matter in my own way. I am not thinking of it at present, however. I want to have a word with my daughter Biddy. Will you go into the house, Miss May? Biddy and I will follow you presently."

"No, Janet, stay here," said Bridget suddenly.

She threw up her head with something of the free action of a young race horse, tossed her curly hair back from her broad brow, and looked first at Janet and then at the squire.

There was something in the expression of her eyes which caused Janet, as she afterward expressed it, "to shake in her shoes."

"Norah," continued Bridget, "you must stay here too. Now, father, I will tell you something. I will tell you why your Biddy can never, never again be the old Bridget you used to know and to love."

"Oh, don't," interrupted Janet. "See how hysterical you are, Bridget. Don't you think, squire——"

"Hush!" thundered the squire. "Let the colleen speak."

"Father," continued Bridget, "I am a very unhappy girl. I have behaved badly. I have been wicked; I have been dishonorable and—and deceitful."

"No, no, I don't believe that," said the squire. "Whatever you are, you are not deceitful." Once again his face turned white, and an angry light leaped out of his eyes.

"It is true," continued Bridget, "and—and *she*

tempted me—she, Janet May. I never met anyone like her before. She tempted me; I don't know with what motive. It isn't right to tell tales of a visitor; but I—I *can't* bear things any longer, and I have got so confused in my mind that I don't know what is right and what is wrong. I don't wish to excuse myself, but I do not think I'd have done the dreadful things but for her. I wouldn't have done them, because they never would have occurred to me. Perhaps that is because I am not clever enough. I don't want to excuse myself, but she tempted me to do wrong, and I did wrong, frightfully wrong, and I have been, oh, so miserable! And Norah here—poor Norah—she guessed at my trouble, and she thought she'd punish Janet. That's why Janet was away last night. It was very wrong of Norah, too, but she did it out of love to me. Oh, father, how miserable I am! Why did you send me to that English school? I can never, never, *never* again be your old Biddy; never again, father, never as long as I live."

Here poor Bridget burst into such convulsive weeping that her words became inaudible.

Suddenly she felt a pair of arms round her neck, and, looking up, her lips touched her father's cheek.

"Let me go on," she said; "let me get it over."

"Not until you are better, colleen. There is not the least hurry. Come down and sit with me in the bower near the Holy Well. We shall have it all to ourselves."

"But the others," said Bridget—"Janet and Norah?"

"I sent them away. Why should they hear what one O'Hara has to say to the other?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CHILD OF HIS HEART.

JANET ran quickly toward the house. On her way she met one of the servants, a man of the name of Doolan; she stopped to say a few words to him eagerly, then, running on, found herself in the great hall, where Lady Kathleen, Pat, Gerald, and Sophy were all assembled.

Lady Kathleen uttered a scream when she saw her.

"Oh, how glad I am——" she began.

Janet interrupted her hastily.

"Dear Lady Kathleen," she said, "I will speak to you presently. I will tell you all my adventures presently; but please, please let me go up to my room now with Sophy; I want to say a word to Sophy. Please let me pass."

There was an expression about Janet's face which caused Lady Kathleen to fall back, which arrested a torrent of words on the lips of each of the boys, and which made poor, frightened Sophy follow her sister out of the room without a word.

"Come upstairs with me, and be as quick as ever you can," said Janet.

She took her sister's hand as she spoke, rushed up the stairs with her, and entered the large room which the girls shared together.

"Now, Sophy," said Janet, "how much money have you got? Don't attempt to prevaricate. I know you received a letter yesterday from Aunt Jane, and she—she sent you a five-pound note; I know it—don't attempt to deny it."

"I don't want to deny it," said Sophy. "You—you *frighten* me, Janet; we have all been so miserable about you. I could not eat any breakfast; I was crying as if my heart would break, and now you come back looking like I don't know what, and you speak in such a dreadful way."

"Never mind how I speak," said Janet; "pack your things; be quick about it, for we must be out of this place in ten minutes."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I'll tell you presently. Pack, pack, pack! Fling your things into your trunk, no matter how—anything to get away. If you are not packed, with your hat and gloves on, in ten minutes, you shall come away without your finery, that is all."

"But how are we to get away?" said Sophy. "We can't walk to the station; it is twenty miles off."

"I know that, but I have arranged everything. Mike Doolan will have the jaunting car at the top of the back avenue in fifteen minutes from now. I only want to pack and lock our boxes; they must follow us by and by. Now, don't waste another moment talking."

Janet's words were so strong, her gestures so imperious, that Sophy found herself forced to do exactly what she was told. The ribbons, laces, trinkets, which she and Janet had amassed out of poor Bridget's stores

during their stay at Castle Mahun were tossed anyhow into their trunks; the trunks were locked and directed, and the two girls had left the house without saying a word to anyone long before Squire O'Hara and Bridget returned to it.

Janet was worthless through and through; Sophy was very little better. The curtain drops over them here as far as this story is concerned.

What more is there to tell?

How can I speak of those events which immediately followed the departure of Janet May and her sister?—the wonder and consternation of Lady Kathleen Peterham; the astonishment and curiosity of the retainers; the secret triumph of Norah Maloney and Pat Donovan; the intense amazement of the boys!

Amazement had its day, curiosity its hour, and then the memory of the English girls faded, and the waters of oblivion, to a great extent, closed over them. Lady Kathleen sent their trunks to the address which Janet had put upon them. They were addressed to a Miss Jane Perkins, and Lady Kathleen concluded that she was the Aunt Jane of whom Janet stood in such wholesome dread.

The squire made an important discovery on that unhappy day. It was this: O'Hara of Castle Mahun could brook no dishonor in the person of his nephew, or sister, or cousin; but the child of his heart could be forgiven even dishonor.

"I will myself write to Mrs. Freeman," he said, after he and Bridget had concluded their long conference. "O Biddy, child! why did you not tell me before; could anything, *anything* turn my heart from thy

heart? But listen, acushla macree, your Aunt Kathleen and Pat and Gerald must never know of this."

Of Bridget's future history, of her many subsequent adventures, both at school and at home—are they not written in the book of the future?

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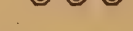

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